



ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹ॥



*Kaho Nanak Gur Bandhan Katey
Bichbrat aan Milaya*

Bijay Singh

[Painful experiences of wife Sheel Kaur
and son Waryam Singh - Khalsa remaining steadfast
to the high principles of Sikhism even when faced
with greatest of odds...]

Bhai Sahib Bhai Vir Singh

Translated by :

S. Devinder Singh Duggal

M.A. (History) M.A. (Economics)



Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan

Bhai Vir Singh Marg, Gole Market
New Delhi - 110001

ISBN : 978-93-80854-17-5

© Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi
4th Edition, 2010

Publishers

Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan
Bhai Vir Singh Marg
New Delhi-110001

Printer

Print Media
1331, Chok Sangatrashan,
Paharganj, New Delhi - 110055
(m) 9810765258

Price : 64/-

Translator's Note

Those of us, who have had the occasion to read the original work of Bhai Vir Singh may be able to appreciate the difficulty involved in its translation into English language, but, not quite fully perhaps. When I first accepted the assignment, I too did not think it to be as weighty as it later turned out to be. It is not because that I had not read the book first but, paradoxically, perhaps because that I had done so. Any reader of Bhai Vir Singh is so much carried away by his lucidity, sweetness and the total effect that he is completely swept off his feet. I too was caught in the net of such an enchantment.

When I actually tried to translate its poetic similies, mystical references, folk songs and scriptural quotations and intricate narrations etc. it was only then that I realized the full weight of the challenge. And, the anxiety to capture the total effect and spirit of the original text added to my predicament. Had I not been fired by the same passions which had prompted the worthy author to write the book, I might not have succeeded in completing the job. However, if it helps, even a bit, in the moral regeneration of the Sikh Youth, I shall feel fully compensated for my labour.

Devinder Singh Dugaal

M.A. (History). M.A. (Economics)

194, Udham Singh Nagar
Jullunder

Preface

Hardly any one of the few historical accounts of the Punjab does justice to the significant role the Sikhs have played in moulding the destiny of this region. At many places these accounts are in fact prejudiced and erroneous. Much needs to be done to the rectification of this balance. An attempt has been made in this book to highlight the role of the Sikhs during a specific period of history, in the hope that it would help stem the rot that is setting among the Sikhs because of ignorance about their heritage.

Neither any self-interest nor any claim to academic excellence is involved in this attempt which, at best, is a humble gesture towards rebuilding the grand edifice of the Sikh Panth to reiterate its original glory. The gesture, I know, is no more than that of the squirrel who tried to put earth on the bridge of Sri Ram Chanderji, and may be even much less. As a zero (0) acquires great value when, through the grace of Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh), numeral one (1) is placed before it.

I gratefully acknowledge the help that I received from the oral accounts of some elderly persons, since head, the two Panth Parkash, and histories of the Sikhs by Princep. Cunningham, Mohammed Latif, Malcolm, McGregor and some other authors, in writing this book. Some other sources could also be profitably tapped, but as I was in a hurry to meet the Panthic need, I thought it advisable to depend upon the available well-entrenched traditions, I

have tried to join the missing links by gathering information from folk lores and group memories. In my narrative styles poetic similies and metaphor appropriately used, will refute the charge that the Punjabi language is not a cultured and developed media. The development of this language would be in the longer interests of the country as also of our own great community.

More and more people among our ranks are growing oblivious of our glorious past and thus losing their resilience. This degeneration must be averted. The book stresses the need of recapturing the divine spirit of the Ideal Man created by Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa represents spiritually elevated people who are blissfully cheerful, fearless, invincible but non-aggressive. The book highlights the glorious manner in which the Khalsa remained steadfast to its high principles even when faced with the greatest of odds..... Let me hope that it would help us to re-imbibe among us the Spirit of bravery, humility, compassion and all the divine qualities with which our forefathers were blessed.

Bhai Vir Singh

Introduction

As a result of the onslaught of British regime, people in India, especially in the Punjab, felt demoralised. The seemingly peaceful life was fraught with inner turmoil. To secure their interests, the priestly class had to resort to appeasement of the ruling clan. During the reign of Mir Mannu, the Governor of Lahore, the Sikhs were persecuted and suffered large scale massacre. Establishment of the Sikh rule also demanded supreme sacrifices and the Sikhs had to struggle hard.

Decline and downfall of the Sikh kingdom in less than a decade of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death greatly demoralised the Sikhs. Christian missionaries' inroads into the Sikh society and their attempts at proselytisation greatly disturbed the Sikh intelligentsia. Scholarly persons like Bhai Vir Singh tried to ameliorate the lot of the Sikh masses by restoring their morale. For this purpose Bhai Vir Singh successfully used literature as an ideology in making appeal to their past through his novels and other writings. Mainly set in the historical milieu of the 18th century of the novels of Bhai Vir Singh became powerful vehicle in heralding a new phase of self-consciousness and pride in past among the Sikh community.

Coming soon after *Sundri*, his first novel, Bijay Singh appeared in 1899. Briefly the story of this novel revolves round Bijay Singh, son of a courtier Diwan Lakhpat Rai, turned Sikh. This created panic in the family and none, except his wife, welcomed this step. Bijay Singh leaves the home along with his wife, Sheel Kaur, and his young son. The novel vividly portrays the trials and tribulations of Bijay Singh and Sheel Kaur. All the episodes narrated are

awe-inspiring and reveal the strength of the man of faith to bear the tortures. Infatuated with the beauty of Sheel Kaur, Mir Mannu desired to have her in his harem. Begum Murad does not cherish this idea. When she meets Sheel Kaur, she is impressed by her forbearance. The story takes a turn when Mir Mannu dies and his son succeeds to the throne under the regency of Begum Murad, his mother. Later, on the death of her son, the Begum begins to rule and marries for the pleasure of the flesh. To check the intrigues of the courtiers she makes a common cause with Ahmed Shah Abdali of Kabul. Bijay Singh is seriously injured in an encounter with Abdali forces and comes into contact with his wife. He succumbs to his wounds and Sheel Kaur also breathes her last then and there.

Studded with historical facts the novel deals with the character qualities of various people, fanatic and tyrannical rulers, greedy priests, high headed mullahs, helpless lot of common people and the young men surcharged with passion to end the tortuous life at the hands of the Mughal rulers by joining the Sikhs forces.

Present publication is to introduce the English knowing people to the writings of Bhai Vir Singh, the great poet-Saint.

It is gratifying that Sri Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha, Gurudwara Katong, Singapore had decided to publicise Bhai Vir Singh's writings in English and other languages which will go a long way in including the young men and women the true spirit of Sikhism and inspire them the way of life imbibed by the Sikh Gurus. Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan is glad to associate itself with this noble enterprise of the Singapore Sangat.

Harbans Singh

New Delhi
November, 1983

Honorary General Secretary
Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan

Bijay Singh

CHAPTER I

The city of Lahore, for ages, has been a very important political and cultural centre. A fuller account of it all would require greater span of time and a larger canvas than we have in this book. Here we shall confine ourselves to the accounts of some of the events that took place around 1808 and 1809 Bikrami (i.e. 1751 and 1752 A.D.)

Having suffered defeat at the hands of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the king of Kabul, Mir Mannu¹ sued for peace which was granted on payment of rupees fifty lakhs and numerous other rich contributions. As a result Mir Mannu was allowed to continue as the ruler of Lahore². By now Maharaja Kaura Mal, a true friend of the Khalsa and Diwan Lakhpat Rai, their sworn enemy, after having

1. Mir Mannu whose full name was Mir Muin-ul-Malik, was the son of Wazir Kamur-ud-din and was the ruler of Punjab. In 1748 A.D. (1805 Bikrami) he had defeated Abdali during his first invasion of India and on this account had become the Governor of Punjab. Immediately after the end of the rainy season, Durrani mounted another invasion and Mannu made peace with him on payment of the revenue of some of the 'Pargnas' (districts). This was the third invasion in 1809, Bikrami (1752 A.D.), some accounts of which are given in 'SUNDRI'. Maharaja Kaura Mal died during this campaign (1751-52 A.D.).
2. Mohammed Latif : p 224.

played their respective roles in the world, were dwelling in honour and dishonour respectively in the Lord's Court. The Khalsa, now, was left with no real friend in the government. Many a time in the past, Mir Mannu had availed himself of the help of the Khalsa, but that was out of sheer compulsion. Otherwise, deep down in his heart, he continued to harbour feelings of enmity and hatred against the Sikhs, like pockets of poison in a snake. Having escaped unscathed from the impending danger, and becoming the ruler once again, he began to tyrannize over the Sikhs more than ever before.

At that time there lived at Lahore a person by name of Chuhar Mal, who, besides being a money lender, also held some office under the government. He was the very embodiment of corruption, cruelty and callousness. His son, Ram Lal, was also a government employee who was then posted in the Majitha area of Amritsar.

One day, in the evening there was a great hustle and bustle in the ladies' quarters of the house of Diwan Sahib (Chuhar Mal) who himself, sitting on an Irani carpet was reclining against a cushion. Facing him was his aging wife who, sitting on a golden couch, was narrating the details of the engagement ceremony of their son. Close by, was their daughter engaged in embroidery, while their daughter-in-law was sitting wrapped in a beautiful shawl, and a long veil over her face like the nest of 'Bijra'.* Bent over the threshold of the door like jessamine, she appeared to be talking to the Earth below. Suddenly, a maid servant announced the arrival of the family priest who, said she, 'wished to talk urgently'. Diwan Sahib asked her to lead him there and meanwhile another maid

* Bijra an elongated bird's nest.

servant immediately brought a sandalwood chair, and spread carpet over it, as the priest stepped into the room. Slim in body, yellow complexioned and sharp featured, he bore such an impression on his face as betrayed, to some extent, the cunningness of his mind. As he took the chair, Diwan Sahib and his whole family paid homage to him. He blessed them and signalled them to take their seats. Then, he said "Diwan Sahib, I am shocked (pretending to be choked with emotions, he turned his head aside); O Lord, the dark age (KALYUG) has really set in. Shastras and Vedas had prophesied that the dark age would be calamitous and now we see it come true with our own eyes. The dark age has truly set in, yes, the darkest of dark ages indeed".

Diwan : (Bewildered) Pundit Ji what has happened after all?

Priest : How shall I put it? The moment I heard this news, I was terribly shocked. O Lord, It is a real tragedy.

Diwan : Pundit Ji, for God's sake let me know as to what has happened? (Meanwhile, Pundit Ji's talk had such an impact on the women folk that they began to tremble like a sounding metal disc hit with a hammer.)

Pundit: O my Master, what should I say? I don't have the heart to tell you of such a terrible news, but, for your sake, I have to do so.

Diwan : Pundit Ji, please tell me immediately.

With tearful eyes and a choked voice, the Pundit said, "Being alms giver (Patron) you are just like God to me. Ramlal, Ram Lal, R-.-.-.a-.-.-.m-.-.-.L-.-.-. (his voice gets choked).

Diwan: What after all has happened to my dear Ram Lal? For God's sake let me know immediately.

Pundit: Ram Lal has embraced Sikhism.

The news fell like lightning on the whole of the family: everybody began to cry and the room was filled with their cries of anguish. Tears were running down their cheeks like monsoon rains and all of a sudden the whole house was enveloped in grief. At the sight of their distress the maids also could not restrain themselves and began to weep like flowing fountains,

The Pundit, at first, kept quiet, but, after a while, rose and coming over to Diwan Sahib, said to him consolingly, "Be composed Diwan Sahib. If you betray your feelings like this, you are bound to be in for more trouble, because, if the news gets public and reaches the Nawab Sahib, then, as you know, there is every danger of all of you being absolutely ruined. It is no time for weeping, you should rather think of ways and means to contain the rot. At this the crying stopped and, after dismissing the maids on some pretext, they busied themselves in taking counsel.

Diwan: Pundit Ji, how, after all, has this tragedy come to pass?

Pundit: How else it could be except through evil company? Yes, this company alone has undone him. I had already advised you against sending him to any place near Amritsar, because he was bound to be misled there. How could he remain unaffected at that place when, even while here, he sympathized with the Sikhs? Don't you know how sympathetically he used to feel for the Sikhs at the time of their last carnage. I had fore-warned you even then, but you were of the opinion that as he became mature, better counsel would prevail on him.

Diwan: How to avert this tragedy now? O my son what have you done?

Pundit: First of all make sure that the news does not reach the Nawab.

Diwan: I am not in my senses; you alone should do something in the matter, Pundit Ji.

Diwan's Wife: Yes, you alone can come to our help, otherwise, we are ruined.

Daughter: Pundit Ji, save the life of my brother, somehow.

Pundit: Don't you worry, Diwan Ji, send for Ram Lal immediately through a trusted person and try to bring him round in secret. There is still time for him to see reason. If, however, he continues to stay in the company of the sikhs, then no amount of advice would be able to redeem him.

Diwan: All my servants are at your disposal. Do whatever you like; I cannot think of any thing at the moment.

Immediately thereafter, the Pundit sent for Ram Lal through some trusted persons on the pretext that Diwan Sahib was seriously ill and wished to see him and that he should reach post-haste.

Now as the Pundit came in again, the wife of the Diwan, offered him some gold coins and falling at his feet pleaded with him for the safe conduct of her son to his house.

After consoling the members of the family, as the Pundit left for his house, the elder son of the Diwan came in and hearing the details of the happenings pretended to weep in the presence of the parents. However, coming to his wife, he had a hearty laugh and confided to her that they would now be the sole heir to the entire property, because one of the brothers was mentally retarded and the other now is all but lost. 'The entire property and all the valuables would now be ours and ours alone', he said.



CHAPTER - II

Four days later, the Diwan was sitting in the courtyard of his house along with other members of the family. He looked like an eclipsed moon among hazy stars. Every-body's heart was withered like lotus flowers bitten with frost at Ram Lal's conversion to Sikhism. For all these days, smitten with utmost grief, they had been invoking the divine help. Everybody was afraid that some one may report against them to the Nawab. On the pretext of indisposition, the Diwan had remained indoors all the time. Ram Lal's mother was more grief-stricken than his father, firstly because he was the youngest of her sons and secondly his wife, a 'sehajdhari Sikh', served her very devotedly. While her other daughters-in-law treated her just casually. Ram Lal's wife loved her more than even her own mother. For these reasons, Ram Lal and his wife enjoyed more love at her hands than did the other members of the family.

This was the scene into which walked Ram Lal along-with his wife and son. Thinking his father to be asleep, Ram Lal walked softly but, the Diwan opened his eyes. He was infuriated at the sight of his son. The frail and feeble looking Ram Lal had been transformed into a tough and brawny lion-like 'Singh'. It was a complete transfiguration. He could not be recognized from the athletic build of his body and the glow on his face. However, humility in his eyes enabled the Diwan to recognize him to be no other than his own 'unmerited' son, who had endangered the whole family by his conversion to Sikhism. Instead of any feelings of affection for

his son, the Diwan, in extreme anger, addressed him thus,

“O Ye, accursed fellow, I wish you had never been born. It would have been better if either you or your mother had died before your birth. May you be destroyed for having driven me to these straits at this age.”

No body could say for how long the Diwan would have continued in this venomous mood but for summons from the Nawab. He changed his dress and went out. Touched by innate love, the mother now embraced her son and hugging him to her bosom, began to weep copiously. (Joining them) the sister also began to cry. While Bijay Singh had not been much affected by the wrath of his father, he was deeply touched by the love shown to him by his mother, sisters and brothers. It did not, however, induce any haziness in his mind, deeply imbued as it was with profound religious fervour. After sometime he said, “Mother dear, why after all are you wailing thus?”

Mother: Dear son, it is because you have embraced Sikhism.

Son: Is it a sin to be a Sikh?

Mother: No, my child, it is not a sin, it is rather a very good thing.

Son: Is there, then, any other defect in it?

Mother: No my dear son. It is very virtuous. No other member of the family is gifted with those virtues with which you have been blessed as a result of reciting the holy hymns of the Great Gurus. You are particularly endearing when you are reciting these hymns. I am convinced that this house has been blessed only because of you. Ever since you were born, this house has become increasingly prosperous and (embracing her daughter-in-law) since the day this dear one stepped in here, our

fortunes have ever been on the ascendance. This (fondling her grand son) beloved child has brought everything and every blessing one could dream of.

Son: Why then, dear mother, do thou lament?

Mother: One must move according to times. Once a lion asked a wolf "Does my mouth give a foul smell?" The wolf replied, "Yes, my lord." The lion got angry and said, "You accursed fellow, how dare you say such a thing to your king." He fell upon the wolf and killed him. He then asked an ass, "Why O boy, does my mouth smell?" The ass said, "No, no, my lord, your mouth is actually sweet scented." The lion killed him as well saying "You ass, how dare you, tell a lie before a king. I won't let you live." It was now the turn of a fox who was also asked the same question by the lion. The fox replied, "O Sire, Lord, I am suffering from cold. As a result of sneezing my nose has been infected and, as such. I have lost my sense of smell. Had I been better, I would have definitely answered your question." The lion laughed and said, "From whom did you acquire this wisdom?" Pointing towards the dead bodies of the wolf and the ass, she said "From these dead bodies." My son, the circumstances now are similar. The true and upright Sikhs are as much maltreated by the Turk kings as the Hindu sycophants. The wise people like your father adopt the middle path and as such are comparatively happy.

Son: Dear mother, apparently your advice may be quite good and the common sense also counsels likewise. However, as far as I am concerned, the time has yet to come which will prove whether I deal with the Turks like devoted Sikhs or follow the policy of servile flatterers.

Mother: My dear, child, these hair that you have grown is the real cause of our grief. Haven't you heard,

that in a freshly sown field, many a bird was picking grains. When the farmer caught hold of them and was about to kill them, one of birds said, "I am neither a sparrow nor a parrot and besides, I do not live on grains; I am a crane living on feed from water. I was here just to play with these birds'. The farmer told him, "You may be right but as you have been found in their company, you are as much a thief as they"! Similarly my son, the Turk rulers, like the farmer, do not spare anybody. Can you tell me what harm did Bhai Mani Singh do them? In spite of the fact that he had the same love for the Hindus and the Muslims both, even then he was cruelly done to death. For these reasons, I am really worried about you. However, we have no objection to you persuing the Sikh way of life within the four walls of the house, because, "In secrecy lies security."

Son: Dear Mother, your words of advice appear to be quite sound but just mark the holy words of Kabir!

"Kabir, I am imbued with love of Him, who is the most wise

Ignorant are they who dissuade me from this path,

How can I live after breaking away from Him,
who is my very life and soul." (217)

Dear, Mother, "Those who take to dance, discard the veil",

My dear mother, (With a deep Sigh) 'my heart is suffused with the love of Guru Gobind Singh (KALGIANWALA). His love has permeated my whole being and I hear the celestial music of 'Gurbani' always and everywhere. In every leaf, every flower and every hue I behold his exquisite Divine Form, and I am ever drawn towards it do what I may. As a Sikh, I am aware

of the woes of this world and fully realize your anguish and the predicament of my father, but alas, I cannot help it now. Like a person caught in a whirlpool, the love of my 'beloved one' fully envelopes me and there is no wish to be out of it. My dear mother, you have only heard about Guru Gobind Singh, but, as for me, he is ever with me."

"His face is like moon, eyes like lotus with a hue like antimony,

I am so much overwhelmed by His graceful glance, that I am a humble follower of Him, every bit"

Mother: (Sighing pathetically) It is true my son. Those imbued with love are all but lost, but let us try to have the best of both the worlds.

Son: Do please let me know the way O' mother, in which I may preserve the integrity of my Faith and the sanctity of my hair till my last breath, without, causing any discomfort to any of you.

Mother: Give up the hair and the company of the Sikhs and assume the form of your father. Then sitting at home, you may do whatever you like.

Son: O' mother, you have grievously wounded my soul. Do you expect me to be a hypocrite or to give up my hair which are dearer to me than my very life? How can I throw away the crown with which I have been blessed by my Guru. They are the valuable symbol of the love of our beloved Guru. May I be dead before it ever comes to pass. The beloved Guru is the very life of my life and the very soul of my soul. O' mother, how can I ever defy the commandments of Guru Gobind Singh. (With a deep sigh and tearful eyes) May I never live to see such an accursed day.

Mother: My dear child, how can an obtuse one as stone hearted, appreciate the tender sentiments of your

heart? However, I think, true religion lies in heart and need not be publicly paraded.

Son: The Lord God blessed the world with True Religion (Dharma) through His blessed souls. Whatever has been ordained by the holy Guru Gobind Singh is my 'Dharma' (true religion).

Mother: Would all those who do not grow hair, be condemned to hell my son?

Son: I am not aware of it, but, this being the command of my holy Guru, I must obey. The beloved Lord has commanded us to wear hair, how can I dare to go against his precepts? "You are my Lord, me a mere imitation", says the holy Gurbani. Moreover, the hair add to the beauty of the body and safeguard the spiritual powers of head and heart. They are the gift of our Lord and guide the destinies of the PANTH. My dear mother, it is very difficult to be truly religious. I am only trying to follow in the foot steps of my True Guru. Even an effort in this direction is a blessing *par excellence*. Believe me, if ever I am able to imbibe fully the true essence of my Faith, it would be a very great blessing indeed.

Mother: What do you mean, my son? Aren't you a Sikh as yet?

Son: Respected mother, far from being a complete Sikh, I am as yet not worthy of even being the shoe bearer of the true Sikhs. Sikhism, O' mother, is a very exalted state and people of the three worlds long to have even a glimpse of a true Sikh.

Mother: What after all, are you, then?

Son: My body is so completely drawn towards my Lord that there is no room for even a mustard grain, and my soul is so thoroughly attuned to His holy feet that only, those blessed with a sense of discerning can perceive it.

Mother: My dear son, I don't know what to do? I can't really understand what you say?

Son: Imbued not with Lord's love,
In false pursuits the world is lost,
Headlong goes it down its doom,
Aware not of Divine love's boon.

Mother: It is true, my dear; after all what do I know about your mysteries? (with a sigh) I am afraid my lovely child that you may now become the target of the Mughals who (weeping) may do to you what God alone knows? My dear son, take pity on your aged mother and have a little regard for her love for you. Sitting at home, you may offer anything in charity, spend any amount to support the Sikhs and their saints and do anything else that you may like. If you engage yourself thus in your religion would not your Guru be pleased then?

Son: Why not? But, mother:

"If money could such love purchase.

Why his head then Ravana gave¹?

Of money he was never short

Himself being a prince and lord".

Mother: I wish I were dead before hearing such words. I have ever been praying for your welfare and now you talk in terms of laying down your life. Be well advised, my son and leave this difficult Path. You should learn a lesson from 'Dhru' and 'Prahlaad'. Besides, you are an eye witness to the grim tragedy of Bhai Mani Singh. My very heart sinks even at the thought of the miserable condition of Bhai Taroo Singh's mother. This is a very very dangerous Path, my dear son.

1. It is said that Ravana gave his head to propitiate Lord Shiva.

Son: "If I have to traverse oceans,
Hills, forests and indeed the entire
Universe to attain to the love
Of the Lord, I will do it as happily as
If I were taking but one step".

Mother: Why, my son, are you so crazy after all?
I do not intend to check you from a good cause; my
only concern is that you should not publicly parade your
affiliations with Sikhism. You may engage yourself in
charity and meditation etc. This also brings happiness and
good name.

Son: (With a deep Singh) O' my mother,
"Meditation, reflection and moderation,
Comforts, honour and approbation,
All these treasures, in a trice,
For Lord's love, I'll sacrifice."

Mother: (Despairingly) God knows, why are you so
enamoured of it, when everybody treading this Path is
known to have come to grief.

Son: "The canopy of love spreads
across the Sky (heart),
However, love lorn beetle (mind) remains
attached to Lotus (lord)"

Mother: This also appears to be a craze like that of a
drunkard, otherwise, why aren't people like us attracted
by it? Alas! my son, you seem to have lost your head. Try
to be a bit more sensible.

Son: Dear mother, the holy Scriptures say, "Let the
homes and hearths in which the Lord does not dwell be
burnt to ashes, because in their loss does not lie our
ruination. It lies in our alienation from Lord God." How
can you enjoy the divine bliss, unless you recognize your
true destiny through the grace of the Lord of aigrette

(Guru Gobind Singh) "Those who are gifted with, the divine love, ever do they dwell upon his feet,' Says Nanak, those who feel the pangs of such a love, they go not any where else.

Mother: All my efforts to dissuade you from this Path seem to have been of no avail.

My dear child, do not try to scale these perilous heights and walk on this dangerous Path. You should meditate on your Guru secretly because you are still a child. If you are found out, there will be no escape for you. How would you save yourself then?

Son: Dear mother, I am aware of all this, but "Howsoever grave the danger and howsoever restless and helpless the mind; (by the grace of the true Guru) the humility is ultimately recompensed like the lotus in the mud."

Sister: How is it, dear brother, that you refuse to hear the remonstrations of mother? You have always been very docile and dutiful.

Brother: Dear sister, I can't help it now. "In Lord's love am I, so completely, lost. Unmindful am I, now, of all awareness and thought"



CHAPTER – III

Overwhelmed with grief, the mother now hugged her son to her bosom and began to cry copiously: with tears streaming down her eyes, she said to him. “Take pity on thy aged mother, my dear child. Take pity on me.”

The young Sikh also could not restrain himself and with tears in his eyes told his mother, “Dear mother, for your sake, I promise to remain indoors. You can ear-mark a room for me on the first floor. I will avoid going out and meeting people so that you may not have to face any difficulty on my account. However, under no circumstances, I would forsake my religion to save my life, which, after all, is only transitory.”

Mother: My dear child, I am really grateful to you for agreeing to do even this much for me. But wouldn't you feel too lonely then.

Son: No, my mother, I am rather happy to be alone. My SATGURU is ever with me.

Everybody seemed to be satisfied with this makeshift arrangement. Meanwhile, however, accompanied by the family priest and his elder son, the Diwan arrived there and said, “Accursed Ram Lal, get out of my house and don't ever try to come here again.”

Pundit: What has gone wrong with you, Ram Lal, being of a princely stock, you have degraded yourself. You may yet redeem yourself by forsaking Sikhism.

Mother: Pundit Ji, you cannot wash blood with blood. Let us be a little more considerate and affectionate. Ram Lal has agreed to stay at home in secret. I will arrange things in such a way that he doesn't have to go out. If

you turn him out, he is bound to go straight into the jaws of death. It is better to be wiser about it.

Pundit: This could be feasible, but the time for any such secret arrangement is now past, because the Nawab has already come to know of it, and has told the Diwan Sahib that Ram Lal should either cease to be a Sikh or he should be handed over to him. With great effort, he was prevailed upon to concede only this that in case Ram Lal refuses to relent, then he must be turned out of the house.

Mother: Ah! I am all but dead, Pundit Ji, take pity on me. I can't stand my son rolling in dust. O' my God, what should I do?

Diwan: Have you lost your head? The infected part of the body must be amputated to save the rest. In order to save the entire family, its honour and its wealth it would be appropriate to sacrifice Ram Lal like an infected part.

Mother: O' my God! You compare this pious soul, our only support in the next world, with an infected part of the body. He, my dear child, is the pride of the family.

Diwan: You appear to have lost your senses. If you don't see reason I will have your head shaven and turn you out of this house as well.

Son: (Falling at the feet of his mother)

Dear Mother, please do not, have yourself insulted for my sake. Whatever fate has ordained for me must come to pass. You need not worry because you are blessed with two more sons. Let me be taken as dead. After all the mothers who lose their sons, also abide in the will of God.

Mother: May the other sons have a long life. But, my dear son, how would I be able to live without you? You are the very source of my life, my dear child.

Elder son: Mother, why can't you be a little more wise? Must all women be fools? In view of the danger

looming large over us, you must pray for the welfare of the rest of the family.

Mother: Ram Lal, if you leave me I shall be as accused as a barren woman is. The pangs of separation shall ever consume me like the fire of a pyre and, day in and day out, I shall cry in anguish.

Diwan: Don't be fool, otherwise, you may have to face the gallows alongwith your son.

The two sisters of the young Sikh had been crying bitterly all the time. Catching hold of his hands, they pleaded with their brother thus, "We are just like your cows, whom you must feed. You must heed your father and serve us all from utter ruination."

Like the rest of the family the maid servants, who had ever enjoyed favours at his hand, were also crying in anguish. The Diwan was highly enraged, while the pundit, though pretending to be distressed, was not much concerned. The elder son kept watching everybody in awe and anger.

Mother: My dear son, I plead with you in the name of the Lord of aigrette (KALGIANWALA), to agree to my suggestion. I beseech you in His Holy Name.

The moment the young Singh heard the plea in the Name of the Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh), he was totally confused and confronted with a moral dilemma. If he turned down the plea made in the Name of the Guru, he could be accused of betraying Him and if he accepted the plea then he was sure to be condemned as an apostate. 'What should I do', he thought? This conflict and the love of his mother as well as the affection of his sisters so overwhelmed him that he fell down in a swoon.

Such was the challenge and trial that our forefathers faced when they chose to adopt Sikhism. And this treasure

is being frittered away by us at the altar of material gains and lust. May the Great Guru, save us.

The swooning of Ram Lal lead a scene of great panic. The maids rushed to sprinkle rose water on Ram Lal which helped him to regain his consciousness. Guided by her maternal instinct, his mother grasped the hand of her son and caressingly said, "My dear son, I withdraw my plea in the Name of the holy Guru. Now, let you be strong."

Ram Lal was hardly on his feet again, when the Diwan, taking him by an arm, told him to get out of the house without any more delay.

As Ram Lal took a step forward his wife and son rushed to him. Grasping her arm, the Diwan told his daughter-in-law, that she could not go. The faithful wife however, freed her arm and followed her husband. Just then, the mother said, "Wait a little, my son". Holding him by his arm, she made him sit down alongwith her. Tearfully she said to him, "You should have killed me before leaving this place. At your hands I would have been redeemed in my next world. Now you must, at least, leave your wife and son behind."

Son: They belong to you, my dear mother, you may keep them with you.

Wife: (Pleading with folded hands) Respected mother, Please excuse me and let me go. I cannot remain away from him, and shall accompany him wherever he may go.

Mother: My dear daughter, who shall look after me.

Daughter-in-law: But, respected mother, what would I do without my lord? I have great regard for you, but, being the servant of my lord, how can I live in comfort at home, when, I should be sharing the suffering of my dear husband? How can a part separate itself from a whole?

In him alone lie both my worlds, here and hereafter; he is my partner in comfort and care and he is my only support in all circumstances; he is my very own, as such, how can I separate myself from my ownself?

Diwan: It is truly said that the company of the sikhs is like a sharp sword; that is why, this girl is so out-spoken. Let us keep the child back and let her get out of here along with her husband.

The Child: No, Grand Pa', I will not stay back. I will be where papa and mummy are.

Diwan: Why, O' little kid?

The Child: How shall I feed myself if they are away?

Pundit: You blockhead, won't you get food at the Diwan Sahib's house?

The Child: Everybody smokes here. How can I take my meals from them, and who shall sing to me the holy hymns? Who shall relate to me the stories of the Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh).

Diwan: (Striking his head in great despair) Alas!, the whole lot is irredeemably lost.

Diwan's wife: (Lifting her grand son and caressing him) why don't you stay with me, my dear? I shall cook your meals.

The Child: But then you shall ask me not to grow my hair, which I must grow. Besides, how can I live away from my father who enjoys the blessings of the Lord of aigrette. How can I forsake my mother who relates to me the life-stories of Guru Nanak Dev Ji?

Diwan's wife: You, the very incarnation of all that is divine, take me, the meritless one, also with you. You are divinely blessed, take pity on me and let me also accompany you.

Diwan: (Disengaging his wife's hand in great anger) Get back, you blockhead, and (to his son and daughter-in-law) get out of here forthwith.

Diwan's wife: (Taking hold of a knife lying close by) My dear son, if go you must, then you must kill me first. (Running after him, she catches up with the young Sikh in the doorway and thrusts the knife in his hands). Relieve me of this wretched life; how can I survive without you? Ah! I am being robbed of my kith and kin, and no body makes a bid to save me. Let somebody bring ashore the fast drowning ship of my family. (Crying thus in anguish, she digs the knife in her stomach and begins to bleed profusely. Immediately, thereafter, she began to feel giddy and then fell down unconscious). The elder brother pushed the Singh (Ram Lal), his wife and his son out of the house and closing the door behind them bolted it from inside.



CHAPTER – IV

Ram Lal for his parents but Bijay Singh for the Khalsa, after leaving his house alongwith his wife and son, passed through the deserted bazars of the city of Lahore and reached the house of a person, who, though not a baptised Sikh, yet lived like one; the only thing he lacked were the hair. This pious person provided shelter to the Sikhs in his house in their hours of need. Although, he sincerely wished to grow hair like all baptised Singh, yet, with a view to be of some help to them he decided to live like a Sehajdhari Sikh, for the time being, hoping to achieve his goal in the next birth. In those days there were a large number such persons who believed in the Sikh tenets yet did not adopt the form of the baptised Sikhs and preferred to live like Hindus, so that they could be of some help to the 'Singhs' in times of difficulty. For any religious lapse on their part, they used to present themselves before the Panthic congregations volunatrily and gladly accept any corrective – penalty imposed on them.

When Bijay Singh reached this house, Leela Ram, the owner, received them very warmly and lodged them in such a portion of the house, which was neither easily accessible nor easy to locate. Taking bath, everybody engaged himself in reciting holy hymns from Guru Granth Sabib after which they had their meals. At night fall, while discussing the difficult times which the Sikhs were then living, it came to be known that order for the forcible eviction of Sikhs from the city of Amritsar had been passed and all those areas which the Sikhs had

freed were being reoccupied. Flag marches of the Army were taking place in all parts of the Punjab and at various places army pickets were established in improvised huts. In view of these difficulties, all such bands of the Sikhs which had been able to assert their authority and had been offering stiff opposition, had now vanished into deep recesses of wastelands, woods and hill fastnesses. However, the poor Sikhs leading settled family life were not able to escape the wrath of the ruler.

Gajjan Singh: Have you heard about the tragedy of the day?

Majja Singh: No sir, what has happened?

Gajjan Singh: 'Wahe Guru', (Glory be to God) Sajjan Singh has been martyred.

All Singhs: What? Has 'Bhai Ji' (Brother-in-Faith) left us?

Gajjan Singh: Let me relate to you the details of this grim tragedy. For full five days Sajjan Singh was kept a prisoner alongwith his wife and children and not a morsel of food was given to them. For all these days, they had been starving and the condition of the poor children had been particularly agonizing. However, all of them bore it most bravely and did not lose heart, so much so that even the jailer was all praise for them. This morning all of them were brought to the 'Mandi'. First of all the two sons were killed right in the presence of their parents, then, the wife of Sajjan Singh was put to death and thereafter he himself was most mercilessly martyred. His hands and feet were first bound with a tree to prevent any movement on his part. O' my God, all those who were present there, were awe-stricken. Seeing that, everybody was convinced that the days of the Mughals are now numbered. Most of the people could

not stand the ghastly sight and turned away. But, my Lord, with what a devotion 'Bhai Ji' kept reciting the holy hymns. Alas, his voice was at last stilled. Blessed is he that he remained steadfast in his Faith right upto his last hair and final breath.

Everybody was horrified to hear about this horrible tragedy. All of them were in tears and highly enraged. But, for the time being what could not be cured had to be endured.

Ajja Singh: Singh Ji, how after all was 'Bhai Ji' (Sajjan Singh) arrested?

Gajjan Singh: Through that ghost of a fellow, who proved a traitor.

Bijay Singh: That one? Is he so bad? I did have some misgivings about him, but it is only to-day that I have known him in his true colour, O' God the wolves are masquerading in sheep's clothing.

Dili Bhan Singh: Khalsa Ji, we must take it bravely. It is the will of our Guru that his followers should be martyred at the hands of the Mughals so that their regime collapses vitiated from within by these brutal deeds.

Mughal Daman Singh: That may be true, but, for how long more shall it go on? The Sikhs are being killed in Lahore and their children are being cruelly persecuted. The Khalsa is obliged to retire to the jungles while their kith and kin left behind, are being victimized in a vicious fashion.

Bijay Singh: Let us devise some means to unite the whole Panth. (Repeated knocks at the door)

What is this? The doors of the house are being knocked at. Lala Leela Ram now came running and gasping for breath said, "Khalsa Ji, immediately leave this place, otherwise, we will be doomed, because, the government

seems to have got wind of you. The house has already been surrounded by the army units, both on horse and on foot.

Rago Singh: So what? We will fight them?

Lala Ji: True, but it is advisable to let this house remain a secret cell for the khalsa, so that it could be availed of in times of emergency. Otherwise, at Lahore you will be left with no shelter whatsoever.'

Bijay Singh: Let us then be led to some exit towards the back of the house dear benevolent Sir.

Lala Ji now walked concentrating hard towards a cavity in the staircase and pulled out discarded and broken pieces of some old articles, including sacks and rags. It revealed a stone slab which fitted perfectly into the cavity length and breadthwise but seen only when carefully examined, because of its earthly hue. It was now cleared of the dust. By inserting a rod in a small hole in the wall and applying on it a little pressure, the stone slab was lifted and then moved aside by two of the persons. There was an iron sheet underneath, which also had a hole in it, in which a small needle was inserted and then rotated. The sheet got divided into two parts, which slid down along the wall. Underneath below seemed to lie a well. With great skill, Lala Ji helped all of them to climb down and then made them swear that they will keep the knowledge of this tunnel a complete secret. Providing them with two small lamps, he directed them to go straight ahead and not to turn to their right because that side, he told them would lead to the For and had been blocked from outside. Going straight ahead, at some distance he told them, they would come across a stone with a small hole in the middle. By inserting a small rod in the hole, the stone would slide back into

wall. Behind, would be a small mound of earth. A little push and it would fall apart, making way for them to go out of the tunnel. They should then pull out the stone from inside the wall and when it clicked, it would be an indication that the door had been closed. They should then cover it with earth and go their way. Bidding farewell, the Khalsa walked down the tunnel and Lala Ji again closed the small hole in such a perfect manner that no trace was left of it. After replacing against it the discarded articles, the Lala retired to his room. He had completed the process with great skill and dexterity. Army units outside the house were getting restive, completely unaware of what had happened inside. By now, the main gate had been opened and the soldiers had stormed into the front yard, with the obvious connivance of the new servant who had turned an informer. He must have entered Lala Ji's service with this very purpose. However, Lala Ji was too shrewd and too alert to fall a victim to such a conspiracy. From the very first call, he could make out that the Army units of the Turks were there and that was why he had acted with such speed. A little delay could have spelled disaster.

Now, Leela Ram's servant, who had accompanied the troops, and two of the Army Jawans knocked at the door of his bed room, calling upon him to open the door without any delay. At the same time, he heard one of his loyal and sincere servants telling the Army Jawan that as Lala Ji was not feeling well, he might have gone to sleep. The Lala now opened the door and stepped out, rubbing his eyes after hastily covering the lower part of his body with half of his '*dhoti*' and spreading the other half over his head. As if bewildered on seeing the soldiers, he asked them, as to what had happened? One of the soldiers told

him that there was a complaint against him that a large number of Sikhs were hiding at his place. It was for this reason that the soldiers had raided his house. He was further asked to accompany them to the outer courtyard where the '*Kotwal*' was waiting for him.

Leela Ram: It is prepostrous. Sikhs and in my house? But, truth need not fear; as such, why should-I be scared? Let me first dress up.

Soldier: No, you must accompany us forthwith.

Leela Ram: Very well.

He accompanied the Jawan silently and, on reaching the courtyard, paying formal tributes to the kotwal, kept standing. Looking discreetly around, he could feel that guards had been posted on every balcony, every door and every exit of the house. The Kotwal, who otherwise happened to be his friend, was in a rage like a swollen river and threatened to engulf the entire Haveli (House).

Kotwal: Although you are my friend, yet political offences are unpardonable. I may be obliged to resort to force, otherwise, you should have the Sikhs arrested.

Leela Ram: You are like a king to me and I am a mere servant. My house is completely at your disposal. You may search every nook and corner of it or I can lead you to any particular place you may ask me to go. If even a single Singh is found hiding in my house, I shall submit to any punishment that you may prescribe for me. Even otherwise, I cannot take any exception to what you may do to me. But this appears to be a malicious attempt by some inimical person to harm me. However, whom "God doth preserve, no harm can ever come" to him.

Kotwal: Why should there be any need for a search? If you have them arrested yourself, I shall treat them with

moderation, otherwise, they would be dealt with very severely. We have very solid information with us.

Leela Ram: If they are taking shelter in my house and I am trying to shield them, then, I am certainly guilty. But, when they are not there, how can I help? However, it would be better if you satisfy yourself personally.

Now, a thorough search of the house, including its rooms, basements, cellars, yards and every corner was looked into, but, there was not a trace of the Sikhs. The Kotwal though fully satisfied was yet reluctant to leave such a rich establishment empty-handed. A petty revenue official from Delhi pretending to sympathize with Leela Ram advised him to make suitable offerings to the members of the contingent purportedly for the inconvenience to which they had been put at that odd hour. Henceforth, he told him, any petty complaint against him would be brushed aside and the government would also be informed about his innocence in this case. On this, Leela Ram sent for a trayful of gold coins which he presented to the Kotwal, who affecting reluctance, said that how could he accept illegal gratification from his close friend.

Leela Ram: Had I been found guilty then it would have been an illegal gratification. It is meant only for a little refreshments for the soldiers. The Kotwal now handed over the amount to the revenue official, pretending at the sametime, reluctance to accept it like a '*Hakim*' (Doctor). Thus, like a whirlwind, they left after reducing a happy home to shambles. Thereafter, the government was apprised the non-involvement of Leela Ram. The informer, instead being penalised for misleading, was given a small reward so that he could continue to work as a spy.



CHAPTER – V

Let us now see what happened at the other end. Walking underground, the Khalsa had to pass through a very old tunnel. The narrow low passage and with both ends closed made breathing so painful. It was only the instinct of self-preservation which goaded them onto the other end, where, working on the instructions of Leela Ram they opened the way. Emerging out, they found themselves at a deserted place. After closing the mouth of the tunnel with the stone, they did not know which way to go. Moving a little further they sat down to decide about it. No body had any idea of the place where they were or the direction they should have followed. At last putting their faith in their Guru they walked on. They had hardly covered a little distance, when, in the moon light, they saw a mud hut with a guard at its door.* At the sound of the footsteps, he raised an alarm and almost instantaneously a large number of soldiers came out of the hut. Crying aloud, "The Sikhs have come, the Sikhs have come", they fell upon them. The unfortunate Sikhs were caught unawares, but, having been blessed with courage and conviction, they refused to accept defeat. They drew out their swords and gave a good fight, in which both the sides tried to get the better of other. It was an absolutely unequal battle with a ratio of fifty to one against them, but even then, the Sikhs, as ever, came out with flying colours. At last the enemy soldiers, feeling nervous, slipped aside

* This was an improvised police picked meant for killing the Sikhs. In those days many such pickets were established.

and the Sikhs also accelerated their pace in the direction they were taking. The enemy soldiers headed towards the opposite direction. Thus, both the sides, anxious to disengage, started running. Bijay Singh could not keep pace with his fellows-in-faith, because his wife having been wounded in stomach had lost consciousness. Taking her aside, he attended on her. Having been brought up in luxury, she was the very embodiment of beauty, and delicacy and it was the first time in her life that she had to face such difficulties and distress. Like a sudden storm in a calm ocean, it was a day of great distress in her life. The heart-rending attitude of the family members, the forced expulsion from the house, the tragedy of the previous night, coupled with the stress of the journey and finally a narrow escape from the enemy attack was too much for a delicate lady like her. It was her firm conviction in her 'Faith' which proved to be her anchor now. Through the efforts of her husband, she finally regained consciousness. The wound, was not very deep, yet a hard blow with the butt of the gun had completely un-nerved her and she had fallen flat under its impact. When she gained consciousness, the couple found the field quite deserted, with the dead bodies of many a Sikh and Turk, lying all around. Taking advantage of the situation, the prudent Bijay Singh collected a couple of swords, daggers, a gun and some ammunition and headed towards the North-West. Although his wife could not walk properly, yet the sense of self-preservation, continued to goad them on. By dawn, they had travelled about seven miles. Some villages did lie on the way but they always bypassed them. By the time they reached a jungle, the sun had risen in the sky. The jungle, for them was like a fort and they decided to take rest at a heavily shaded grassy spot. Very soon they

were fast asleep after the manner of a father 'who had married off his daughter or a horse-dealer who had sold off his stock. Normally after such an exhaustion, sleep does not come easily, but as they were deeply religious with full faith in HIS WILL, very soon, they were as fast asleep as INDRA, the god, sleeping on his throne. Under the influence of a very gentle breeze, they felt relaxed and refreshed.

Getting up a little before dawn, they bathed themselves in a nearby pond and satiated their hunger by eating the fruits of a 'ber' tree (*Zizyphus Jujuba*). Bijay Singh had a mind to spend a couple of days in this very wood but spying some Turk soldiers on the nearby track, he came to the conclusion that the place was not very safe and hence left it a little before twilight. By the dayfall, they had arrived at the bank of a river. The receding sun, the rising river and the fast descending night combined to create such an eerie atmosphere that one felt queer creeps in the body and had a paralysing sense of despair. Just when they were losing all hope, their eyes sparkled to see a boat, which though not yet filled to capacity, was being lowered into the river. On a call from Bijay Singh, the boatman paused, waited for them to board and ferried them across the river. Having no change with them, took the boatman aside to give him one of the gold coin (Mohars) which Sheel Kaur took out from a money bag tied to her waist. Hardly had they taken a couple of steps when they were surrounded by the fee collectors, followed by a number of soldiers who arrested their crying aloud. "The accursed Sikhs, the accursed Sikhs." Through their search, the Sikh family was divested of everything including ornaments and gold coins. However, two rings escaped the attention of the soldiers who also overlooked their

swords. Leading them ahead, the soldiers threw them into a small hut which afterwards they bolted from out side. Darkness descended on the hut in all its frightfulness and an ominous silence prevailed all around. While sinful world appeared to be quite at rest and every happiness seemed to dwell with the tyrants and the traitors, embodiments of righteousness and Truth, were having very miserable time during this endless night. The people in distress manage to pass their time counting the stars, but the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh were locked in a place where they could not avail even such a means to beguile times. However, the holy Gurbani of the Guru lent solace to the suffering souls. When Bijay Singh and his family began reciting the holy hymns, they heard some one uttering the holy words "Guru, Guru", in great pain. The startled couple opened their eyes but could see nothing in the darkness: Turning around they saw someone bringing a lamp through the door which was now open. Who could be the person with lamp, they thought? O it is our own son, Waryam Singh. When the couple was engrossed in prayers the little pious soul, managed to open the room by passing his slender arms through a slit in the doors. Although his arms got injured in the attempt, yet he succeeded in unbolting the door. All through, the couple was neither aware of this attempt nor did they hear the holy word 'Guru' being uttered by someone. The young child, however, had heard these words and on opening the door he found the guards fast asleep, being dead drunk. At that the child brought the lighted lamp from their bronze lamp-stand. Touched by his gallant effort in the tradition of a true Sikh, the father kissed his forehead. In the light of the lamp, he saw that about half the hut was besmeared with the blood of a wounded woman who,

lying close by was on her last breath. Like the dying flame of a lamp, she would at times, gain a little strength to utter the holy words, "Blessed Guru, Blessed Guru," but immediately thereafter, she would fall back exhausted. The child brought some water in a bowl to his father who reciting the first stanza of Jap Sahib, dipped his sword into it and then put some of this holy water into the mouth of the dying soul. As the water went down her throat, the dying woman gained some consciousness and opened her eyes which were eloquently grateful. Next, the fast collapsing woman, like the true Sikh, managed to gather courage and in a sweet low voice said, "Blessed indeed is Guru Gobind Singh who has sent someone to take care of me in my last moments." Sheel Kaur who all the time, had been watching the dreadful sight with pain and anguish, now asked, "Mother, what has happened to you?"

Woman: My child, my husband and myself had hardly crossed the river when the Turks surrounded us. My husband killed five of them in the ensuing fight, but being outnumbered, he was ultimately overpowered and thrown into the river. Two more soldiers were slain by me, while another was grievously wounded at the hands of our son. However, the accursed enemy then killed my son, robbed me of ornaments and threw me here in a seriously wounded condition. Since about dusk, I have been struggling between life and death, but, great indeed is our Guru who, in his mercy and compassion, had sent you at a time when I was dying of thirst. My dear children, I have now received the divine Command for my final departure and would soon be gone. Already I see the light ahead, yes the true light. My Children, defend the treasure of your Faith, even with your lives. Better be dead than lose your Faith."

With these words she departed on the wings of her true Faith, and the dying flame was extinguished for ever. The exertion involved in speaking had opened the wound in her side, which had started bleeding again, and this hastened the flight of the woul bird out of the cage of the body.

Bijay Singh, now forgot his own troubles and did not even care to make good his escape through the open door. All that he cared for, at the moment, was to cremate the dead body, lest it be desecrated. He gathered around the body some flammable material in the form of three or four cots and some straws lying in the hut and set them on fire. The three of them then bid farewell and slipped away. When the guards, who had been asleep all the time under the influence of intoxicants, opened their eyes at daybreak, they saw the entire hut in flames. Their own cots though at a distance were also beginning to be affected by the spread of fire. They got up in panic and seeing the scene, started abusing the Sikhs. None of them tried to put out the flames, because they did not mind the destruction of the government property. Moreover, they could not do anything. From the day's plunder, they had enough and to spare to propitiate their officer (Jamadar) and hence, they were not much concerned. Meanwhile, they were joined by some more soldiers from the neighbouring pickets. All of them were amazed at the daring exploits of the Sikhs and were all praise for their manly courage.



CHAPTER – VI

When Bijay Singh left the house, his mother lay with the wound from the knife. It was caused in the stomach, a sensitive part of the body, but, fortunately, it did not prove fatal. Although for the time being Chuhar Mal was very much offended with his wife, yet; he had always had a great regard for her prudence. On all domestic matters, he always sought the advice of his wife who was also very often, consulted on political matters as well, for her sound sagacity. On her being wounded, many a renowned physician was called for her treatment. The wounds got healed in about a month's time, but the separation of her son had left such a pang in her heart that it even burnt like a funeral pyre. She did attend to her household chores, but, the thought of her son always tortured her and the echo of his sweet voice always rang in her ears. When a boy in the neighbourhood recited JAPJI (holy Gurbani) like Bijay Singh, she was deeply touched by his voice. Ultimately, she bought a hand-written copy of Sri Guru Granth from a calligrapher, installed it in a comparatively inaccessible place in her house and by offering to meet his expenses, she persuaded the boy to recite to her, daily, the holy hymns from the Holy Book. This led to a gradual detachment on her part from the world and she became more of a religious woman. Now, she loved Bijay Singh more than ever before and had a better appreciation of his unshorn hair which, hitherto, she had attributed to his whim. She was ever thinking about the ways to obtain some information about her son. At last she came to the conclusion that the family priest was the most suitable

person for such a purpose. She knew about his cunningness but hoped to bring him round by the temptation of wealth. Calling him in one day, she offered him a handsome amount to placate him and thereafter frankly asked him to locate her son so that she may be able to send him some money through him. He was further requested to persuade her son not to come into the open till the storm blew over and she was in a position to call him back home.

At first, the pundit said that it was a very difficult task, but ultimately agreed to try as best as he could and assured the lady that he had every hope to be successful in the matter. At this, she gave him two thousand rupees in advance. A fortnight later, the Pundit came to inform her that he had been able to locate Bijay Singh. The love-lorn mother, giving him about a thousand gold coins and some diamonds, pleaded with him to hand them over to her son in distress. The Pundit assured her in the name of God the holy cow and the Shastras that he would comply with her wishes. However, bringing the articles home, he buried them in deep pit and the very next day started in search of Bijay Singh.

By then, the Sikhs had again became very active, particularly in the areas lying between river Ravi and Beas. On the other hand, Mir Mannu had also let loose a reign of terror on them and they were being mercilessly killed. Every day a number of Sikhs were brought to Lahore and put to the sword on which account, they had become the talk of the town. Mannu had a feeling that Adina Beg was cunning with the Sikhs and hence, he instructed him to be tough with them and exterminate them root and branch. Hearing such disturbing news, Bijay Singh's mother was very anxious about the fate of

her son. Her maid servants, who could read her mind, also brought her the news about the Sikhs and she got them confirmed by discussing the same with her husband. The bits of news being then received were as under:

Maid Servant: Hon'ble lady, there is terrible news today.

Lady: What has happened?

Maid servant: About two thousand Sikhs captured recently were brought today to the deepest base of the Shalimar Garden, where two hungry tigers were let loose on them. They fell upon the Sikhs ravenously and tore them to pieces. One shudders to believe such a terrible thing. However, dear lady, it is said that not even a single Sikh cried in anguish and, all the while, all of them were reciting the praises of God, "WAHEGURU: WAHEGURU".

Lady: Who else was there?

Maid servant: Beside the Nawab and his courtiers, our Diwan Sahib were also there. Seated on the upper platform, all of them were heartily enjoying the show.

Lady: Those who are in for destruction first, lose, their sense of morality. The Mughal rule now is bound to come to an end. O' God save thou, my son, as you saved Prehlad. May he never come to any harm.

Maid Servant: Please don't worry. God is always with him.

Lady: Did any of these Sikhs, belong to the Khatri caste?

Maid Servant: I could not say Madam. Because, all the Sikhs look alike-tall, healthy, truthful and extremely brave. I don't think they have any caste; distinctions such as of Jat and Khatri are just not made among them.

Lady: If they were caste-ridden, they would not have been brave. Their strenght lies in their sense of equality and unity. Can a roof ever rest on torn walls? A palace can only be raised on strong walls of equal size.

One day, the Lady, sitting on the roof, while drying her hair was singing these lines of a song:

“Nourished in love and raised with fond,
The child has left me and is gone,
Into pieces is broken my heart
Where to go and whom do my tale I impart?”

When, the wife of Kulpat Rai the Nizam (A state official) arrived there in a palanquin and the two close friends greeted each other with warmth, on meeting. The Nizam's wife, offered condolences to her friend. For her son having embraced Sikhism, as if he was dead. During their talks, she also gave her the harrowing accounts of the battle at Makhawal in these words:

Nizam's wife: Sister dear, the Sikhs are in real danger now. Inspite of their virtues, the government of the day is bitterly opposed to them. Last night, as my husband narrated to me the accounts of Makhawal battle, my hair stood on end. As you might be aware, after their last battle with the Afghans, the Sikhs had occupied the entire area lying between Amritsar and the base of the hills, though not long thereafter, the roving units of the army had forced them to vacate and seek shelter in forests. Some of them as, were left behind in towns, were put to death mercilessly. Only a few of them could escape to the jungles or to the hills. But the Sikhs too, on their part, did not allow any respite to the army. In night raids, the Sikh guerrillas would suddenly pounce upon the enemy ranks, causing great devastation. Only recently in a pitched battle with Moman Khan near Kot Budha, on the bank of river

Sutlej, they killed a number of prominent generals of the Turks and, thereafter, slipped out of the area like a cake of soap from the hands. The situation then took a turn for the worse. Adina Beg, the Lt. Governor of Jullundur, in a bid to remove the doubts about his bona-fides from the minds of the Lahore authorities, has staged a *volta-face* and has turned against the Sikhs. Pretending friendship with the Sikhs, he always looked for an opportunity to harm them. Recently on the occasion of a holy festival gathering at Makhowal, not far from his head-quarters, a large number of Sikhs had gathered there. Sitting in groups they were engaged in meditation and recitation of the holy hymns. Some of them were listening to the 'Vars' of the bards who tried to recapture in songs the heroic deeds of their compatriots and their daring exploits on the fields of battle. All of a sudden, Adina fell upon the unwary Sikhs with a huge army and surrounded them from all sides. The Sikhs tried to brave the odds with courage and skill, but being at great disadvantage a very large number of them had to lay down their lives. The entire battle field was soon drenched in blood and littered with dead bodies. Dread and destruction prevailed every where. However, the brave Sikhs, in keeping with their tradition, did not lose heart and after the initial set back, rallied round to take determined stand. The initial set back was also due to the fact that many of the persons gathered at the festival were not accustomed to the use of arms. As the mass melted away in the initial commotion, the brave among them, thereafter, gave a very tough fight. Adina Beg, in a message sent here, has claimed a big success over the Sikhs saying that they would not be able to raise their heads again. However, according to my husband, Adina Beg has already sent secret message to Sardar Jassa Singh

Ahluwalia, through his friend, Sadeeq Beg, seeking peace with the Sikhs. He has taken the plea that he had to attack them under orders from Lahore. The sagacious, Sardar Jassa Singh has agreed to his proposals in order to get some respite to the Khalsa living in hilly areas of Anandpur Sahib and also to enable the householders among the Sikhs to live here somewhat peacefully, especially at a time, when Mir Mannu is spitting fire against them. Peace having been made between the two, the Sikhs are again seeking shelter at Anandpur Sahib. According to my husband, Adina Beg is a very clever person. He is fully aware that he can continue to be in command only so long as he gives the impression that he alone can control the Sikhs. As such, he could not afford to destroy them altogether, because the Lahore government would then disown him. Thus, while on the one hand, he has secretly made peace with the Sikhs, on the other hand, he has gained favour with the Lahore 'Darbar' by persecuting them and their compatriots living in towns.

Diwan's wife: How did you come to know about it, dear sister?

Nizam's wife: The whole court, yesterday, was agog with such talks and at night, my husband and one of his friends were also discussing this matter at our house. Both of them were of the opinion that Nawab Adina Beg is a very clever fellow, who is neither prepared to accept the over-lordship of Lahore nor is inclined to offend it. That is why, at times, he persecutes the Sikhs and then makes peace with them. He pretends to subdue the Sikhs and at the same time, in order to maintain his supremacy, allows them to create trouble. I overheard these talks, from the adjoining room. However, dear sister, there is

the bad news that Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia has agreed to serve under Adina Beg.

Diwan's wife: Be at rest, my sister, I am convinced that there must be some very strong reasons for it. I am sure he would not be there for long, because, the blood of the Sikhs is very thick. He is sure to join his brothers very soon.



CHAPTER – VII

Going From Lahore, to the other side of river Ravi one comes across river Chenab, of which the expanse and flow is so immense that references about them have been made in many Punjabi proverbs. For example:

“No one knows how Chenab is deep,

Fleets of boats it swallows in a sweep”.

There was a time when on both sides of the river there were vast expanse of thick jungles with various types of trees and creatures. Even now at many of the places, such jungles are there, but in those days they were all pervasive with small gaps. On the North-Western side from Lahore, there was then a very dense forest on its immediate bank and it was at a distance of only a few kilometres from Wazirabad situated towards North-west. It was not confined to the bank alone, but had expanded itself a couple of kilometers off shore. The dense trees and the thorny bushes had made it rather impregnable. However, deeper within, there were open spaces with shady trees. For the Khalsa these very difficult jungles were god-sent resorts in those days. There was hardly a jungle, forest or woodland, then, in which small groups of five, fifty or a hundred Sikhs were not passing their days. At an open space within such a jungle there was a hut built with the straws and wooden sticks. It was surrounded by a ditch and flanked by a thorny hedge. A courtyard separated the front and the hut from the ditch, which served as a protection against the wild animals. For added protection, creepers had been grown all around the hut. There was also a pool of sweet and clean water at a little

distance always filled with rain water and spill over from the river A 'Singh' was then passing his days in this hut, with his family.

The Sun, one day slipping behind the Earth was casting its last rays. It was twilight when shedding its glare, the sunshine is left with about half of its original light. Coupled with the natural beauty of the woods, the mystical splendour of the evening rays imparted to the whole atmosphere an aura of peace and chastity. In the dense forests, even in day time, the sun sends the arrows of its rays through the leaves of the trees, like the glances of a bride passing through her veil; however, the day then had reached a stage when the yellowish gleams of the sun, like the fading glow of a person, could be seen only on the hill tops. At that time, in front of the aforesaid hut, and the inner side of the hedge, was sitting a beautiful young woman whose charms defy description. Religious fervour, peaceful disposition, chastity of character and divine devotion had imparted such a wonderful grace to her beautiful face, that even the most puritan of the Muslim could not have helped to bow before such a beauty. The dove like innocence had bestowed on the fascinating face of the lady, who had never known any wickedness or vice, such splendour that the poets and painters would have found it hard to capture. Only a person blessed with divine love can appreciate the divine beauty of a divine lady, because he is aware that the purity of soul is reflected in the face. Close to her, was a handsome boy who like a fir planted in a flower vase, was tall, slim and bonny. He looked beautiful and innocent with rare wisdom. Virtue and hatred for vice were reflected on his very face like the inner redness of a melon manifesting itself on the green peel.

The mother and the son were making the baskets of *Tamarix dioica*. As dusk prevailed, they put aside their work and after washing themselves sat down for evening prayers (REHRAS). Apparently, for a while, they waited for somebody to join them. A shortwhile later, a person with a face glowing like the Sun and cheerful like the Moon entered the courtyard of the hut and handing over some money to his wife, washed himself and joined them in prayers, recited by the lady while the other two kept listening to her sweet recitations. After the conclusion of the prayers, the wife prepared salty loaves without any ghee (butter) or curry.

This family consisted of Bijay Singh, Sheel Kaur and their son. At that time the sweet moonlight had spread a silvery sheet on the trees, and its rays, after filtering through the leaves, fell on the Earth below. The howling of the wild animals, at short intervals could be heard. All of a sudden, they heard the anguished cries of a human being, which pierced through their hearts like the arrows. The tender-hearted Bijay Singh could no longer restrain himself and with a lighted stick in his hand proceeded in the direction of the cries. His wife and son also accompanied him. During the course of search, they found a wounded person lying under a tree. He was crying in anguish with a number of bruises on his person, some of which were slightly bleeding. With fear in his eyes, he looked horrible. Lifting him up tenderly in his arms, Bijay Singh brought him to his hut. He poured some water into his mouth and after washing his wounds, dressed them with a piece of cloth torn from the dress of Sheel Kaur. When the man feeling somewhat better, offered his thanks to the host, Bijay Singh, from his voice, recognised him to be no other than the family priest of his father. Bijay

Singh asked him as to how had he managed to come to the jungle. Being hungry the Pundit found it difficult to talk, at which the lady brought him all that she had at hand, to eat. Although not fully satiated even after consuming the meals of all the three persons of the family, the Pundit, however, felt somewhat better. The family did not have any more ration to cook. Last evening, Bijay Singh had bought some flour but on the way back he had given it to a starving person, hoping somehow to meet the needs of the family for the evening with what they had in the house. He could not possibly imagine that they would have to entertain a guest, who even after eating the last grain, would not be satiated. After having consumed everything, the Pundit began to relate his story. He told Bijay Singh that his mother had sent him a very handsome amount, with the direction that he should retire to the safety of the hills, preferably to Makhawal, till things calmed down and the nightmare of the wrath of Mir Mannu passed off. Then she hoped to call him back home.

Bijay Singh: Pundit Ji, how did you find me?

Pundit: It was with very great difficulty. I had deputed some spies and even employed some persons for the purpose. Ultimately, a resourceful person, posing as a Sikh, was able to find out that you were living in this jungle, in which, I have been looking for you, now, for quite some time. Today, I spotted you when you were selling baskets. Although you were doing so 'incognito', yet I was able to recognize you. I have been following you and have been repeatedly calling out to you, but you did not respond. Ultimately I followed you into the forest where some dacoits nabbed me and after wounding me plundered me of everything. Thereafter they threw me at the place where you found me lying in great distress.

Bijay Singh: Pundit Ji, I am really grieved that you had to suffer so much on my account.

Pundit: On my part, I am dying with shame that instead of complying with the wishes of your mother, I am responsible for causing you such a loss and trouble.

Bijay Singh: No. No. Please don't worry about me. Wealth is of no consequence to me. It has fallen into the hands of those, for whom it was destined writ, I regret that I did not hear your earlier calls.

Pundit: How can I go and face your mother now? O' mother Earth may I be swallowed by thee ! I wish that the thieves had killed me, so that I would have been spared this humiliation.

Bijay Singh: Pundit Ji, why do you worry? I am sure my mother will not be angry with you. She is sure to be satisfied with your explanation, because, after all, you are an honourable person.

Pundit: My honour, is in your hands, now.

Bijay Singh: I am prepared to help you in anyway you like. But how?

Pundit Ji: By writing a few words that you have received the money.

Bijay Singh: This is a down right lie, which I cannot write. However, I can write the details of the trials and tribulations through which you had to pass.

After these talks, the Pundit went to sleep and the divinely contented family also retired after drinking some water and offering thanks to God.

They rose early next morning. The Pundit had not suffered any thing. Neither had any thief met him nor had he been beaten. He had also not called out to Bijay Singh. The thief was actually inside his own cheating self. The scratches on his person were caused by the thorns of the

bushes, which by sticking onto his clothes, were, as if trying to prevent him from taking his unclean self to the hut of a pious soul. The scratches thus caused on his body were exploited by the vile Pundit by deceptively describing them to Bijay Singh as the result of thrashing received at the hands of the thieves. Now, the Pundit was anxious to reach home and hence rising early, requested the host for leave to depart.

Bijay Singh: Pundit Ji, as you please.

Pundit Ji: I don't have anything on me to meet my expenses. I am wounded, in deep trouble and away from my native place. I don't know, what should I do?

Bijay Singh: Dear Sheel Kaur, do you have anything ?

Sheel: My lord, the amount you brought last evening from the sale of the baskets is with me.

Pundit: Revered Sir, I have a long way to go; how would I manage with such a paltry sum?

Bijay Singh: My dear, if you have any valuable article with you, please do give it because persons stranded in distress must be helped.

Sheel: My Lord, the ring that you gave me when you married me is here. For the whole of my life I do not wish to part with it, and yet I will do what you command me to.

Bijay Singh: You are right, I also do not wish to snatch such a dear article from you, but, my dear, ultimately we have to leave everything at the time of our death. If we give it up now in God's way, we won't stand to lose.

Sheel: My Lord, I can sacrifice even my very head for your pleasure; what more satisfaction can be there for me than to sacrifice it in God's way. Why shouldn't I avail myself of this opportunity to earn your pleasure?

She took off the ring and handed it over to the Pundit, who taking it greedily, left them. On way back, many a time he pretended his inability to walk, and then Bijay Singh had to carry him. This is how Bijay Singh took him out of the wood. Now, after purchasing some flour from the town Bijay Singh came back to his hut.

Once out of the jungle, the Pundit came to a village to stay in an old rest house. Feeling quite happy at having played his part well and thus appropriating the entire amount without compromising his honour, he was now planning for the future. He was sure that by showing her the ring he would be able to convince the Diwan's wife that he had been to Ram Lal and had handed over the money to him. But, he was somewhat apprehensive that the dedicated Sikhs may be able to throw out the unjust and tyrannous rule of Mir Mannu and become the rulers. In that case Bijay Singh would definitely meet his mother and then his mischief would be detected. 'I would then be in very hot waters, he thought, 'I have killed a worm, but unless the snake is killed, and my worries on this account are over, it would not be possible for me to enjoy the fruits of the ill gotten wealth', he said to himself. He began to draw up plans in his mind to achieve such a purpose. Suddenly, his face began to glow as he hit upon a plan wherewith he would be able to kill two birds with one stone. He recalled that a leading Turk resided in that very village and also that the head of a Sikh carried a reward of eighty rupees. He thought that by reporting against the three Sikhs, he would earn two hundreds and forty rupees, besides eliminating the cause of his worry. However, for a moment, he was hesitant at the thought that by so doing he would be committing a great sin. A sinful act is really vicious because to cover it one has to commit another sin and the process assumes the form of

a chain, the last link of which remains unprotected. Consoling himself with perverted reasoning he said to himself that the Sikhs were always anxious to court martyrdom; by reporting against them he would only be enabling them to achieve their aim. Hence, it would be, in a way, an act of virtue on his part. "I am really wise, people kill two birds with one stone while I would be killing three. One, I shall add to my material gains, two, the cause of my worry would be removed and three, I shall earn the merit of a virtuous act" At these thoughts, he chuckled with satisfaction.



CHAPTER – VIII

In the forest, Bijay Singh was passing his days in meditation and singing the praises of the Lord God, when the Pundit came to disturb his peace. However, he was not a person who would be un-nerved by such tidings. After bidding farewell to the priest, Bijay Singh purchased some flour, came back and had the meals cooked. After the meals, all the three members of the family engaged themselves in their routine work. During the day they used to prepare the baskets with *Tamarix dioica*. Bijay Singh, in the guise of a 'Ranghar' would go to sell these baskets in the town after every two or three days. He supported his family with the sale proceeds of these baskets, which did not amount to more than three or four annas (about 25 paise) a day, but with which the contented and the unrepining fellows were quite satisfied. One really marvels at those Sikhs, who, forsaking all the comforts of life, had voluntarily accepted privations and sufferings, banishments and imprisonments, in order to uphold the integrity and sanctity of their Faith. Every Sikh must draw inspiration from them, because by adopting and upholding the Sikh way of life, one can redeem not only one's own life but also that of the whole 'Panth'.

On the third day after the departure of the Pundit, at about sunset Bijay Singh went to the town to sell baskets. After him, Sheel Kaur and her son, while doing their work, kept themselves engaged in casual talks like this:

Son: Respected mother, I did not like that Pundit, somehow.

Mother: But why, my dear child?

Son: Respected mother, I don't know but, somehow he has not appealed my eyes.

Mother: My dear son, as your father had said in the religious discourse yesterday, no body should be denounced for his or her caste; our religion does not approve of it. Similarly it is not proper to judge a person by his outward appearance. A person is good or bad according to how he acts. He alone is bad whose actions are not good.

Son: Then, revered mother, why do the Sikhs fight the Mughals?

Mother: My dear child, not because they are 'Turks or because of their creed or colour. It is because the actions of the Mughals, who happen to be rulers, are not good. Having been blessed with power by God, they should exercise it for the promotion of Truth and Justice. But instead, they are inhumanly cruel towards innocent and poor people.

Son: That is all right. And yet I have not liked the Brahmin. May be his actions are not good.

Mother: Have you seen him doing anything evil?

Son: No.

Mother: Why then, do you call him evil. It is not good to call a person evil on the basis of suspicion alone.

Son: I am obsessed with this thought and I just can not shake it off.

Mother: (Despairingly) My dear son, suspicion seems to have mastered you. Suspicion is inimical and defiles the mind making it unfit for divine presence. My very dear child, this is a mental malady, therefore let us pray to God that you be rid of it.

Putting aside their work, the mother and the son went inside and with folded hands began to pray thus "O' God, the, Benevolent Lord, suspicion has entered the mind

of my son; we are helpless to cure the malady and seek your divine help. Pray, wash the dirt of suspicion from the mind of Thy slave with the holy water of Thy grace and render it pure. You are our sole stay and support. Just as you protect us from wild animals in this jungle, similarly protect our mind from the worldly sins so that we may be worthy of finding room near your holy feet.”

As the Sikh lady opened her eyes after these prayers, she heard some cries like this:

“(Crying) Beat me not, not telling a lie: For God sake pity on me. It must be somewhere near about it. (Crying painfully), please do not beat me, because I would be killed —Alas—poor me— Alas—O’ God, O’ God—”

As the mother saw through a slit in the door, she saw that a thin lean fellow was being held by a Turk soldier, while two other were holding his arms and yet another was thrashing him, saying, “You accursed fellow, why have you needlessly troubled us by leading us into this difficult and thorny bush, where our bodies have been badly bruised. The one who was being beaten was pleading for mercy saying, “Please spare me, all the signs are available now and the place must be quite near,” However, nobody was inclined to believe him.

Just as ripples of waves disturb the peaceful surface of a sea before a storm, similarly there were signs of disturbance on the face of the young Sikh lady. Staring intently ahead and hearing with rapt attention, the brave woman had a foreboding of what was going to happen. She hugged her child to her bosom and said, “My dear son, You are right. The Pundit, has proved to be treacherous. Deep within my heart, I too did have some misgivings,

but, I had managed to curb them. You must take heart now and act bravely. It is time to act according to the instructions of your father. Let us first offer prayers. At this, both of them folded their hands and prayed, "O' Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh) and Master of armies, O' Benevolent Lord, a horde of enemy is advancing and a hand to hand fight is inevitable. I am a feeble woman and he is just an innocent child, the two of us are faced with a formidable foe. You, in your mercy, exalt the low and support the poor. Pray, grant us the strength to face the enemy. May we lose our lives but not our Faith."

By the end of these prayers, she realized that the hut had been found out and the enemy was quite at hand. Addressing her son, she said, "Make haste to take up arms. Be very brave, do not afraid of these Mughals and give them a good fight. Even if I happen to die, don't ever lose your heart. Nor should you surrender your arms, even if you have to lay down your life. Don't ever compromise with the enemy. Our Guru is on our side."

The lion-hearted boy seized hold of the gun which was always kept loaded for emergency and also armed himself with a sword and a shield. The mother also took up a sword and a shield and both of them came out into the yard. By that time the enemy had also reached there. On its arrival, the brave lady asked them calmly but firmly,

"Who are you?"

"We are soldiers and have come to arrest you. If you surrender voluntarily, well and good, otherwise we will have to use force to arrest you,"

The soldier had hardly uttered word, 'arrest', when the boy pressed the trigger of the gun and the bullet hit him on the forehead killing him on the spot. Four of the

remaining soldiers pushed forward in anger while the Pundit hid himself at a distance. They were armed with swords alone because, on coming to know from the Pundit that they were of saintly dispositions, the soldiers had not expected them to put up a fight.

Meanwhile, when one of the soldiers tried to scale the hedge, the brave lady, with her sword, struck him on his shoulder with such force that he fell face down. Another blow from the lady cut through his neck. The remaining three soldiers, broke open the door and together fell upon the lion-hearted lady like an elephant. Meanwhile, the boy had reloaded the gun and from behind a cover fired straight into the chest of another soldier. Discarding the gun, he delivered such a quick blow with sword on the leg of one of the remaining two soldiers who had surrounded his mother that he fell down in a seriously wounded condition. But for this timely help from her son, she would have found it difficult to escape the swords of the professional soldiers. When his colleague was wounded, the other soldier tried to hit the lady with his sword with full force, but the brave woman warded it off with her own sword, which, however, was broken in the process. Rushing immediately in, she caught hold of the gun, and using it as a stick, hit the soldier who, in the meanwhile, had wounded her son. If he had been able to deliver another blow upon the boy, then he for sure would have died. But, with the blow from the lady, his sword fell from his hand. Getting frightened, he had hardly turned to gather his sword, when he received, yet another blow from the wounded child, from the right and still another, with butt of the gun, from the left by the wounded mother. He fell flat, bleeding profusely. All the five soldiers had now been overpowered. Three of them were dead, the

fourth was on his last breaths with a bullet wound in his chest, while the fifth, with a broken leg, although yet alive, was unable to walk. He was, however, still plotting in his mind to avenge himself. He pretended to cry with pain and pleaded for some water. The Sikhs are always inclined to do good to others. Believing him to be in real agony Sheel Kaur brought him some water. When she was trying to pour it, into his mouth, his right hand reached for a dagger under his shirt. Sheel Kaur had her back towards the door and was unaware that her husband had reached there. Instinctively realising that all was not well back at the hut, he had hastened back. When he saw the dead bodies, he realized that the inevitable had happened. Holding his breath, as he looked inside, he saw his wife and son giving water to the foe. His experienced mind immediately realized the danger, when he saw the hand of the enemy groping under his shirt. Leaping forward with the dexterity of a deer, he grasped the emerging hand with such force that only the end of the dagger could touch his wife. When the son saw his mother bleeding from the wound caused by the dagger held in the hand of the soldier, he inflicted a telling wound on his shoulder with his own dagger. Now Bijay Singh fully examined the bodies and found them cold and dead. The last of the soldiers, however, did have some life left in him as yet. After searching him thoroughly, he tended his wounds. After giving him some water he asked him to tell the truth behind the happenings.

The soldier, a Mughal by caste and renowned for his bravery, was full of admiration for the enemy. A child and a woman had overpowered five of the soldiers and were now offering him water and dressing his wounds. A sense

of gratitude overwhelmed him and he told them the story in the following words:

“ A resident of Lahore, today gave secret information to our officer that some Sikhs were living in this jungle. Acting on this cue, our officer ordered us to accompany him for the arrest of these Sikhs. Accordingly the five of us accompanied this informant. Since about midday we have been wandering around in the jungle and getting ourselves bruised by the thorny bushes. We were so tired that we were inclined to disbelieve the informant and actually planned to kill him. But his utterly servile beggings compelled us to pity him and give him more time to recover the tiral. After wandering for a very long time, we were able to find the place after all. As we had been told that the husband would be away to the twon at this hour, therefore, we thought that it would not be difficult to arrest a woman and a mere child. As such, we were somewhat complacent. But, your wife and son gave us such a hot reception that we were completely taken aback and before we could recover we had already been beaten and grilled. For a soldier, it is not ill to be wounded or even to die, but it is a stigma and a shame to be humbled by a woman and a mere child. Today, I am convinced that our days are now numbered and a community whose children and women folk are so passionately committed to their faith that in its defence they are willing to defy death, can never be conquered or forcibly subdued. They are bound to rule sooner or later. For one would never again fight against these valiant people and if I survive, I shall have nothing but praise for their essential human qualities”.

Bijay Singh: (Giving him a pat) But where is that informant?

Mughal: He ran away at the very first shot from the gun of your brave son. Sir, would you please tell me as to when did you train your child in the skill of using sword and gun.

Bijay Singh: The Skill of handling arms is in the very blood of the Sikhs, because we have such frequent recourse to them in defence of virtue. Now, Bijay Singh, examined the wounds of his wife and son. They were not of any serious nature. He offered his humble thanks to Guru Gobind Singh for his mercy. He looked, in turn, towards the dead bodies of those cowards who had attacked an innocent women and a child and, then, towards his dear wife and his beloved son. He hugged both of them to his bosom and said, "very well done. Bravely have you wielded the Sword of the Khalsa and truly have you upheld the glory of the 'Amrit' bestowed on us by Guru Gobind Singh. Such indeed should be our Faith. Great indeed is the Guru who himself protects us and redeems our honour."

He tended the wounds of his wife and son with the 'life giving herb' which every Sikh then carried on his/her person. After the meals, Bijay Singh said that it would be too dangerous to stay there any longer, because, the place was not safe. It was, therefore, expedient to leave.

Son: But respected father, where shall we go?

Father: Dear son, we will join some 'Dal' (organized bands of the Sikhs.)

Son: Very good. Had we joined it earlier, I would have learnt the use of gun.

Father: It is only for your sake that I had chosen this place, because I thought that it would be difficult for a woman and a child to live with a 'Dal'. I had also a feeling

that the 'Dal' also might have to face some difficulty on your account especially at times of confrontation with the enemy.

Wife: Do you really think that women cannot be of any use to the Panth? I am sure, they can render very useful service as helping hands. I think, we must join them.

Husband: Quite true, some of the brave women are serving the Panthic organization very well. I had some misgivings about you but, now I am convinced that you will be able to cope with the difficulties. Let us depart now because the sun is about to set. I hope that by about mid-night, we shall be able to join the 'Dal' of Karora Singh, some of whose members are camping at a place about four miles away.

They left that place, where the wounded Turk was lying in a state of unconsciousness. Looking around in the jungle, they took to the south-eastern direction, taking with them some of the arms and other necessary articles.

How to cover the four miles distance, at that hour of the night was quite a problem, especially with a lady and a child who had never before suffered such shocking experiences and were in a wounded and exhausted state. Engrossed in such thoughts, Bijay Singh was excessively worried. Far from coming to a decision, he was so much carried away by the anxiety that he did not even know as to what he was thinking about. While reading a book when we gradually bring it closest to our eyes, we are not able to read anything out of it. Just as a very fast moving top appears to be standing still and the excessive speed of the Earth cannot be seen, and it appears to be steady to the eyes similarly, because of excessive worries, Bijay Singh also was in a blank state of mind. However, he recovered himself very soon. A person falling in water, at first, goes

down and then the water, in keeping with its nature, throws him up. This process is repeated till, at the end of this see-saw struggle, while a swimmer swims across to safety, a layman, after about ten dives, gets drowned. Similarly, Bijay Singh, ultimately recovered himself from under the water of worries with the aid of his trained mind. The ever shifting mind does not easily let the Yogis to sit in meditation. It makes the concentration of the thinkers equally difficult. But the trained mind of Bijay Singh proved to be of great help to him. The winter rains afflict some people with severe cold, while benefit the crops at the same time. Thus, Bijay Singh recovered himself quite soon. Looking around, as he surveyed closely, he saw a sort of well a little distance away from the forest. He moved in that direction together with his family. They came upon an old house which was in a very bad and shattered condition. However, there was enough room for them to pass the night. Standing at an elevation, they satisfied themselves and decided to stay there for the night.

Just as the night comes out the moment the Sun hides its face, similarly, as soon as Bijay Singh retired behind the cover of the walls of the house, the Pundit came out from behind a tree like a snake from its hole. Rubbing his hand against his shriven stomach he said to himself, "I have caught the serpent in a pot. This clever Sikh had managed to save his life, but ever since then I have been closely following him and have not let him escape. However hard a horse may run, the fly does not lag behind and similarly, howsoever furious a lion may happen to be, the mosquito is not scared by it. Now Pundit the great, let me contrive in such a way that this serpent be killed in the very pot in which he has been trapped. If he escapes

alive then I shall not be able to enjoy the fruits of the wealth I have appropriated. Let me plant some indicative marks here, lest I should again be in trouble at the hands of those cruel officials. Let me go now, but, with such rickety legs how shall I reach there? O'mind, be brave, the hare and the stag also have very lean legs, but, they run very fast. But nay, (thumping his thighs) I am giving a wrong simile. I am a hunter and not the hunted. I shall prove to be a hunter. But, I have been trained in the belief that 'Non-violence is the supreme Religion', and now I am turning myself into a hunter. However, I need not be afraid, because had there been no hunters at all, how could the 'Mahatmas' have got the deer skin (Mrig chhala) to sit upon and where from the 'Musk' (kastoori) would have come. Thus, it is rather an act of virtue. The mind is really very base, because, often, it curses me for being inclined to do a bad act. O' mind, be brave. Many a time, I have told you to be diplomatic but, inspite of it, you try to scold me. O' my efforts, let this mind be nipped because it is my real enemy. It is impolitic and timid. O' my courage, arise and be brave and see for yourself that my mind is trying to dissuade myself from my aim. (After a pause). Now my mind has also agreed to endorse my schemes. I am sure to be happy now, because all my faculties are now working in unison. Any home deprived of unity is bound to be destroyed. O'my mind, you being a Brahmin must act like PARSRAM who was also a brave Brahmin." While he was engaged in such thoughts he was once again troubled by his conscience for what he was upto. But, to still the voice of his conscience he told his mind, "I am a faithful decendant of PARSRAM and he is sure to protect me, his devotee. Why should I be afraid? Let me now make haste

because if it becomes too late in the night then I may have to be in trouble. I have every hope that by day break, the three Sikhs would vanish like stars in the Sky.”

Musing thus, the Pundit, vacillated between callousness and conscience. The fear always leads such persons into a state of vacillation and howsoever hard they may try they cannot overcome the feelings of fear. Hearing the sounds of the hooves of horses and the voice of some persons, the Pundit was so much scared by the thought that they might be the Sikhs, that he immediately took to his heels.



CHAPTER – IX

Howsoever hard the base water of the low lying and depressed areas, on joining the sea, may try to browbeat the Sun, it is unable to do any harm to it. On the contrary, the sun is able to tear it apart from the sea. The enraged water, then, tries to diminish the prowess of the Sun in an underhand way and assuming the form clouds succeeds somewhat in turning back its rays. Thus encouraged, it tries to rise higher, in a bid to take up cudgles with the Sun, but only to fall down in the form of hails. Thus, separated from its home, it wanders about and the stormy winds, goaded by the Sun, do not allow it any rest. Whenever, assuming the form of the clouds, it again rises onto the hills, then, scared by their frightful forms, terrible tops, perilous vales and awe-inspiring rows of trees, coupled with extreme cold, it gets frightened and starts weeping. Striking its head against the vales it stumbles down and reaches the plain. Thereafter, sprawling in the mud it looks for its home and ultimately attains to the sea, where its filth and fatigue is removed. Just as the timid water, running from fear of the hills, manages, sometimes, to reach its goal, similarly the cowards, out of fear, sometimes meet with success in their mission. The frightened Pundit, likewise, came running straight to the residence of the Chief of the town. However, nobody took any interest in him. In a bid to soften the rigid attitude of the guard, he flattered him on the one hand and greased his palm too. Being thus pleased, the guard led him in, where the Pundit coined such stories that orders were issued to Jamadar Hoshier Beg to leave immediately

with some armed horsemen to arrest the Sikhs. He was also directed to take the Pundit along in a palanquin. They started forthwith, but because of the darkness of the night and the jungle on the way, the Pundit lost track to the great resentment of the soldiers who were also feeling sore over his riding in a palanquin. However, the illegal gratification offered by the Pundit was serving him very well. Searching and scanning, they ultimately succeeded in reaching their goal in a state of utter exhaustion a little past the third quarter of the night. The mother and the son were asleep, while Bijay Singh was reciting *Asa-di-war* (the early morning prayer). His melodious voice had, in fact, helped the advance party to find him out. By now the moon had risen in the sky. Bijay Singh offered stiff resistance and crossed swords with the soldiers as a result of which one of them lost his life. The rest of them overpowered him and captured him. The mother and the son had hardly opened their eyes when they were pounced upon like sprouting mushroom. As such they did not have any opportunity to offer any resistance. After tying down all the three, the party left the place.

The Turk horsemen, being tired, were anxious to get back as early as possible. They were not very happy at having been able to capture just a single Sikh and that too at the cost of one of their own colleagues. In order to reach back earlier, Hoshiar Beg decided to put the child and his mother in the palanquin in place of the informant Pundit. He also decided to relieve one of the mercenaries engaged for lifting the palanquin after every half a mile and directed the Pundit to take a turn in this capacity. On these orders the informant dropped down like the melting snow on the hill tops and just as the bale of a grass though loaded on the back of a horse, yet serves as its feed, he

was reduced to the status of a horse from a horseman. However, after sometime, Hoshiar Beg realizing that his master might be offended at such humiliating treatment to the informant allowed him once again to get into the palanquin. In this way, the party covered the distance with great difficulty and at a very slow pace. On reaching the headquarters, Bijay Singh and his family were thrown into a small cell.

As if extremely pained at the maltreatment of such pious souls; the heart of the night burst forth and the sun came out to see for itself the tyrannies committed under the cover of darkness. Perhaps feeling ashamed, the night on its departure left such a thick trail of mist that the sun found it difficult to emerge out of it. A quarter of the day had passed when the governor held his court and the prisoners were presented before him. Just as the eyes cannot stand the glare of bright sunshine, similarly, the governor was taken aback at the sight of the prisoners. A Mulla (Qazi) who was attending the court broke the silence by saying "Have you marked, my Lord, how devilishly beautiful the infidels are. The Devil seems to have gifted them with the treasures of beauty. Just mark how beautiful they are: the very sun seems to have broken into three pieces or some of the stars have fallen from heavens to stand before us. They are just like three ivory dolls or toys made of mercury. God seems to have manifested the light itself in their forms. The heavens must also be inhabited by such beautiful souls. But alas, such beautiful persons are continuing as infidels, and after death would burn in the fire of hell. How I wish that they belong to our Faith and after going to heavens add to its beauty. My Lord, bring them into the fold of our religion, and enable them to illuminate the face of the heavens. By such an act, you shall earn the grace of God. Once they are

in heavens there shall not be any need of light there. My Lord it is my sincere prayer that they should be excused and brought into the folds of Islam. The man appears to be quite wise and will appreciate your friendly gesture. I have every hope that he will agree to accept Islam”.

Just as spark is made by rubbing two articles against each other, similarly, these words of the Mulla rubbing against the hearts of the listeners, warmed up their Islamic fervour and every body endorsed his views. My Lord, an act of virtue should not be delayed, otherwise, we shall be denounced for every moment that they now spend as infidels which, for them also is unbecoming. As such; they should be immediately ushered into our Faith. They are really fortunate to have been blessed with such an opportunity. They are no ordinary beings, because, they are the very incarnation of beauty. We would be fortunate to have such beautiful persons among our ranks. They would benefit us a class. We have brought bravery into the Muslim fold and through them we will be bringing beauty into our midst. I wish that all the good things of the world should come over to us.

A close adviser of the governor who was very witty, enjoyed the license to say anything with impunity. Everybody had to tolerate him without any demur. On hearing the Mulla he remarked. “It is true my Lord, but (mimicking) the bravery now has fallen for KARAH PARSAD (Sacred food). You should bind it down to force it to stay at your palace, otherwise, taking the holy Nectar (Amrit) it may cut you to pieces.”

Quite true! Let us start with the Sikhs we have already captured. God seems to have solved many of our problems, Mian Arif Khan does not have a child. After initiating this child into Islam, we will hand him over to

the Mian and it would not only illuminate his house, but also fulfil the wishes of his four barren wives. In your establishment there is a vacancy for a wage clerk, which can be easily filled in by this young Sikh who appears to be quite literate. Providing him with the job, let him be married to the daughter of Mian Din, and my home, deserted at the death of my wife, can be rehabilitated by this lady. I shall be grateful to you for bestowing on me, a mere Mulla, such a beautiful gift.

The significant smile of the Nawab left no doubt in the mind of the court jester that he was keen to have the lady for himself, rather than give her to the Mulla.

“Qazis and Mullas, Pundits and Preceptors

Beware of four, they are deceivers all”

Meanwhile, when a person informed them that these captives had killed all those four of the five soldiers who had gone earlier to arrest them, all of them were beside themselves with rage. No body could now dare to have a word of praise for the lady or her son who had killed four of their soldiers. Nevertheless, the Chief in spite of his anger, was so much enamoured of the beauty of Sheel Kaur that he dismissed them for the time being with the order “Take away these accursed persons and throw them into the jail. Further orders regarding them, would be issued later on.” The court rose for the day, and everybody left. Accompanied by the jester, the Chief also went into his mansion. Before taking liquor the jester once again advised his Master to initiate the three prisoners into Islam and spare them any more hardship. “Bring that lady into your palace because a more suitable Begum (wife) for you would be hard to find.” Thereafter, coming to the jail, the jester tried to prevail upon Bijay Singh to hug Islam but to no avail. At about dusk, Bijay Singh was

summoned to the palace where every effort was made to persuade him, intimidate him, induce him and even to threaten him, but to no effect.

“A stone cannot get wet, even if it remains under water for hundreds of years.”

Bijay Singh was then thrown into a separate cell, while the mother and the son were imprisoned in another.

“Sayeth Nanak the Gods Servant the Creator helped me overcome myriads such material difficulties”.



CHAPTER – X

The day, by then, had melted like the summer snow when the Nawab and his jester, together with some other advisers, came into the courtyard and took their seats. The mother and the child, with their feet tied to a peg, were standing on one side with a guard armed with a naked sword over them, while, on the opposite side, was standing Bijay Singh with his hands and feet tied to another peg. In an effort to persuade Bijay Singh, the Mulla said to him, "O' brave man, take heart and be brave. Why do you undergo these sufferings. If you agree to our proposal you will be immediately set free."

Bijay Singh: "You are blind with power and pelf. But, howsoever hard you may try, you cannot deter me from my Path. You may do whatever you like, but I am not going to degrade myself in order to save my skin. Who would ever exchange gold for a base metal? This body is not immortal. Die it must; then why not now?"

On hearing these words, a horrible looking person of extremely dark complexion – darker than even night came out from behind and started giving lashes on the back of Bijay Singh. He struck with such a force that deep cuts, as made with a sword, were soon caused on his body. Even washerman may have some compassion for the stone against which he strikes the clothes, but, this heartless persons strained himself to the last ounce of his energy to deliver the lashes under the impact of which the skin of Bijay Singh got red at first, then inflamed, blistered thereafter and finally fat began to ooze out. The valiant man who had been brought up in love and comfort suffered

this torture with exemplary courage. At last he lost his consciousness. Like a helpless caged lioness, his wife was groaning in anguish at this horrible sight. Unable to stand it, she closed her eyes, but, her hands being bound, she could not close her ears and at the thumping sound of the lashes, her eyes were again forced opened. Tears were flowing down her cheeks like rain drops on the marble and her very blood appeared to be gushing forth from her eyes. Alas, what an agonizing state she was in.

As for the child, he was trembling like the reflection of the Moon in disturbed waters of a lake. A flood of tears was streaming down his eyes and all the time he continued to utter these words of prayers, "O' revered Guru, please save my father." His throat got hoarse with crying and his face was pale with exhaustion, but, the cruel persons, blind with power, were not moved even a bit. When Bijay Singh lost his consciousness, the lashing was halted and a few drops of water were poured into his mouth. But he could not be revived. All the three of them were now thrown into separate cells. As the night advanced, Bijay Singh lying face down on the ground gained some consciousness and opened his eyes. But, he could neither see anything nor move even a bit, because his whole body was stiff. He was in an excruciating state physically because of the deep cuts on his back. There was not even a word of comfort for him. In such a condition, the memory of his mother welled up in his mind, who appeared to be saying, to him "Ram, my very dear child, didn't I dissuade you from following this path. But you were adamant and insisted upon following this path of Divine Love. Now see for yourself the perils in which this love has landed you. Your very skin has been flayed. Now, tell me, who is going to help you in this condition?"

It is very natural for a casual observer to be horrified at the sight of such cruelties. But, in the heart of the devotees is enshrined the Guru's form who lends them courage to stand such hardships, by directing their mind from the thought of pain and anguish towards Himself. The pain does not weakened their faith. On the contrary their faith is deepened by the efforts of concentration on their part.

Suddenly Bijay Singh heard some voice. The door opened and a tall youngman with an angelic face and a long beard entered the room. He was carrying a burning torch and was accompanied by some of his servants. Following him were the Jail Warden and some other employees, all of whom were shaking with fear. On seeing the condition of Bijay Singh, the eyes of the pious person were filled with tears. Addressing the warden, he said, "you accursed fellow, may you and your master perish for meeting out such a barbarous treatment to a helpless fellow. With what face would you go before the Lord? Your faces would be blackened and you shall burn in the fires of hell." He then, asked one of his followers to bring a cot which was immediately brought. Kissing Bijay Singh's feet and lifting him up with great care, he put him face down on the cot. He had the cot lifted and left the place amidst strong protestations from the warden who said that, this was being done without any orders from his Master and that is bound to be severely punished for this "Why after all, should you help him, being a Muslim?" he asked.

Pious son: (In rage) "Get away you accursed fellow. Must a Muslim be necessarily cruel? He alone is a true Muslim who, with firm faith in God, loves all human beings as His creation. A Muslim should be just and

compassionate and certainly not cruel". Reprimanding thus, the Muslim saint left the place taking Bijay Singh alongwith him. Unfortunately he was not aware that the wife and son of Bijay Singh were also imprisoned in separate cells and were in great anguish.

The pious person lived in a small hut in a forest, at a little distance from the city. He was a Sayyid by caste and had firm faith in God. For a considerable period of time he had stayed with Bhai Mani Singh and it was through his grace that he had become a saint. Being quite young at the time of Bhai Mani Singh's martyrdom, he was so much distracted and distressed on that account that he came to live in this forest and engaged himself in deep spiritual meditation. Very soon, he attained such spiritual heights that his fame spread far and wide and people of the area began to look upon him with awe and respect. This night, when he heard about the miserable plight of Bijay Singh he came post-haste and without caring for anybody took him away. At a time when Muslim rulers were tyrannizing over their subjects like this, there were some Sayyids like Sabar Shah, who were ever ready to extend help to people in distress. When the saintly Sayyid reached back alongwith Bijay Singh and when he saw his face, the memory of Bhai Mani Singh was quickened in his mind. He was afflicted with such remorse that, for quite sometime, he kept weeping. He had not been able to see his spiritual Master at the time of his martyrdom, but now, looking on Bijay Singh, he saw in him the image of his Master and hence engaged himself in his service with such a devotion that very soon Bijay Singh fully recuperated.

On the other side, the Chief of the area was beside himself with rage on learning about the taking away of Bijay Singh by Sabar Shah. However, he could not do

anything except to writhe like a snake. Much as he would have liked to do something in the matter, he was so much afraid of the Muslim Saint that he did not dare to call on him. Unable to do anything about Bijay Singh, he brought Sheel Kaur and her son Waryam Singh, to his house. He tried hard to force them to renounce their religion, but on their firm refusal he ordered Sheel Kaur to grind a hand-mill and tortured the boy. By now Sabar Shah had come to know about Bijay Singh's wife and son while Bijay Singh was convalescing under his care, the Muslim saint was planning to rescue Sheel Kaur and her son. However, he did not know how to do so because, although everybody was afraid of him, yet he did not think it prudent to challenge the Chief right in his house. Nevertheless, when nothing better could be done, he decided to storm the house of the Chief to rescue the victims. For such a purpose, one day, he reached there alongwith Bijay Singh and some of his own followers. They entered the courtyard, sheel Kaur and her son, saw Bijay Singh from their first floor room. They were so happy to find him alive that they forgot their own afflictions. They thanked God for having been able to see him safe and sound. But alas! instead of meeting him, they were destined for a long separation. The Muslim saint had hardly entered the stair-case when the Chief, having seen him from above, sent out Sheel Kaur and her son through a back door with instruction that they should be taken to Lahore under suitable guard. Himself, coming down he greeted the saint and told him that lady and her son had been sent to Lahore. Dejected, the party had to return. When Bijay Singh came to know about it he was so much distressed that he begged leave of the saint to go to Lahore in search of his wife.

CHAPTER – XI

The world has always maltreated those who are committed to the path of truth and righteousness. Persons engaged in divine meditation, have always been defamed and cheap tales are retold about them. At times even their personal lives are not spared. Praised be these God-Oriented people who, follow their conviction irrespective of the wagging tongues and do not flinch from courting martyrdom in pursuit of their cause. It is because, the Lord God, the cause of all causes, illumines their heart like sunshine. Just as in broad daylight human beings, normally, are not afraid, similarly, the deeply religious persons, on meeting the Lord, draw strength from the light of His love.

The group in which Sheel Kaur and her son were sent to Lahore consisted of five or seven more Sikh prisoners, besides some other criminals who were also made to join this group. Thus, in all, there were about twenty-five to thirty prisoners, men and women both. They were escorted by a detachment of soldiers including two 'Havaldars' and a 'Jamadar'. Being used to similar assignments for a long time, these soldiers had become dead to all human feeling. The 'Jamadar' was even in collusion with some of the dacoits and had enriched himself by sharing in their loot and plunder. He had acquired a lot of landed property. He continued to be in the service to be able to help free dacoits in the event of their capture. In that dark age it was not uncommon for the state officers to plunder people like this. Whenever news about it travelled to the king, these officials always excused themselves by throwing the blame on the innocent Sikhs

who were accused of being robbers and dacoits. In this way many an innocent Sikh who could never even think of killing an innocent person or accepting even a penny of ill-gotten money, had to lose their lives. Such false accusations against the Sikhs, made to the King by the local officials were usually accepted by him without any enquiry, because of his own prejudice against the Sikhs. Today, executive and the judiciary have been separated, and there are independent courts, one above the other, right upto the provincial and State levels. They have to work in a framework of definite laws, to help interpret which, legal experts are also provided. There is no doubt that inspite of this elaborate legal system some of the unscrupulous officers may still manage to do some wrong but this administrative set-up does ultimately help to determine the veracity of a crime. However, in those days, neither any such system was there nor were the rulers as enlightened as Akbar or Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who could weigh the claims of justice and truth. That is why gross injustice in various forms was then perpetrated everywhere. Guru Nanak gives an eye witness account of the conditions prevailing at the close of Afghan rule in India: Says he,

“The kings are like tigers and their revenue collectors, dogs;

They go and awaken people at all odd hours;

Their servants wound people with their claws.” About these conditions. Bhai Gurdas has also said:

“The kings are sinners and, instead of protecting the people, they are plundering them.”

Similar conditions prevailed in India during the later period of the Mughals.*

* Mughals. after years' of intensive historical research, Bhai

On their way to Lahore, the hands and feet of these prisoners had been tied and each one of them was guarded by two soldiers. After about two days' journey, early one morning, the 'Jamaadar' happened to see Sheel Kaur whose hands had got inflamed with the cords with which they were tied. Even his heart melted at the sight of her pain and anguish and he ordered the removal of her hand cuffs, as also that of her son. However, he deputed an additional soldier to guard over them.

At nightfall, the party stopped at a wayside inn, where, while all other prisoners had to suffer the usual hardships, Sheel Kaur and her son were lodged in a comparatively neat and clean place and were provided with good meal and beddings.

The wise Sheel Kaur naturally had some misgivings about this change of attitude and had a foreboding that some trouble might be in the offing. Like a lull before the storm, there had been always peace and calmness before every tragedy that had befallen her. Immersed in such thoughts, she managed to put her son to sleep. Herself, keeping awake, she began to recite the holy hymns whose enchanting echoes created an atmosphere of heavenly bliss by about mid-night. Divested of worry by then, her

Karam Singh writing about the contemporary rulers says:

1. The administration in those days was so loose that most of the villages, big or small, ever lay in fear of plunder at the hands of dacoits. (Banda Bahadur, p. 32)
2. Because of the atrocious behaviour of the officials in the far flung areas, the poor people there were always suffering and starving. (Ibid. p. 43)
3. Even when not in service the Qazi, the Sayyids and the Sheikhs were so cruel towards the people, that they were generally sick of them. (Ibid. p.57)

mind was perfectly at peace and attuned to God. When everybody in the world was asleep except the sick and the ascetics, somebody knocked at the door of Sheel Kaur, but, she did not stir. A little later the door was broke open and a soldier announced that the 'Jamadar' wished to see her. Sheel Kaur kept silent and, like a marble statue, remained undisturbed. The more he called her, the more she withdrew herself into a state of concentration. Finding her in that condition, the soldier got scared and going back to the 'Jamadar' apprised him of her condition. A very strong wind was then blowing. A couple of other soldiers came there. As they tried to peep into the room of Sheel Kaur, they fell back at what they saw. One of them lost his head, while, the other was struck with awe. Just as, at the sight of a snake, people usually watch it from a distance with help of a lamp, but are afraid to draw near it, similarly, the soldiers, sighting her in the light of the burning lamp, could not muster courage to step into the room. Sheel Kaur, by then, was so much absorbed in meditation that if in that state her very head had been chopped off, she would not have come to now about it. She was not unconscious, but, to any observer, she did give such an impression.

On coming to know about her condition from various persons, the 'Jamadar' also got afraid. However stonehearted and evil-intentioned a person may be the thought of some unforeseen danger always invokes fear in him.

The 'Jamadar', no doubt, was an evil person, but he did have some moral grounding. In spite of the unhealthy effect of association with the evil persons of his department, he was essentially not very hard of heart. As a sense

of fear overwhelmed him, he recalled to mind the stories of the saints about whom he had read in his own religious literature as also the sufferings they had to undergo at the hands of the tyrants. The manner in which 'Danial' was thrown in front of the lions who, instead of harming him, had started licking his feet and the miraculous escape of Moses from the tyrannies of Pharaoh flashed before his mind. In the heart of his heart he was very much disturbed but to keep up appearances before his subordinates, he pretended to talk with confidence.

Although he was looking very pale, yet, in a bid to beguile his subordinates he said with some affected courage "Let us go and see for ourselves". Hardly had they stepped out when the lamp was put out by the strong wind. The pitch darkness made the night all the more dreadful and at the howl of an owl they were all the more stricken with fear. The shrieks of the storm and the roars of the clouds overwhelmed them with such awe that they began to be haunted by some imaginary figures. They managed another lamp and started again. When they reached near the hut, the man with the lamp stumbled and the lamp fell from his hands. Another person who tried to retrieve the lamp also fell down in the attempt. As the 'Jamadar' tried to peep into the room, he had the impression of seeing a fire, which, though aflame, yet did not harm the mother and the child. The moment he stepped onto the threshold of the door, he felt intense heat and immediately drew back. One of his colleagues had the impression of seeing a lion circling around the mother and her son and feeling that it was roaring at him, he dropped down with fear. In the flash of the thundering and lightning, all of them had the illusion of seeing a saint directing the angels of death to take away the 'Jamadar' and his soldiers and throw them into the raging fires of hell. By then, it was raining very heavily and a strong

storm was blowing. One of the soldiers saw as if the angel was aiming a heavy mace at them. He got so much scared that he became unconscious and fell down on the ground. In a bid to eradicate this sense of fear from their minds, the awe-stricken 'Jamadar' asked one of his men to bring Qazi Ruk-un-din to help them by reciting holy verses from the Quran . From the days of Banda Bahadur, the Muslims in general were under a strong impression that the Sikhs were gifted with some Holy Words which had invested them with supernatural powers. The 'Jamadar' was now convinced that the lady was reciting the same holy words by which the Sikhs managed to save themselves. As a confirmation he recalled that whenever he happened to see her during the day she was all the time reciting something in her mouth. By then the 'Mufti' had also arrived there but, having heard about the happenings there he too was so much panic-stricken that he did not dare to look into the room. At the Jamadar's bidding too he began to recite 'Kalma' (the verses from Quran) but his voice was not very coherent.

Now, the very earth appeared to be bursting under the impact of the raging storm and the thundering clouds. Stricken with terror, as the Mufti and the soldiers tried to run away from the place, their clothes got entangled with a tree. Thinking that they had been seized by some ghost, they got so afraid that all of them fell down. In a fit of terror the 'Jamadar' had the feeling of seeing many ghostly forms. As he tried to run he happened to see a bolt of lightning rising from the fire of the hut which he felt, thundering past, had hit him with great force. He dropped down with fear and felt his clothes to be on fire. He cried in great pain feeling sure that the angel of death had thrown him into the hell of burning fire which showed no sign of any let up in its fury.

CHAPTER – XII

Let us see what is the nature of the happenings as described in the previous chapter? Such situations do arise out of firmness of faith on the part of the devotees like Sheel Kaur, and the divine benediction with which they are blessed by God. Like all true Sikhs, Sheel Kaur had decided to face the impending danger to her honour at all costs. She resolved to sit in meditation on God and not to move from that place even at the cost of her very life. Such types of devotees, the God has ever saved.

“The saints’ honour, God e’r upheld. Prehlad He saved, Harnakash He felled.”

The yogis also confirm that if a person meditates on God with devotion and single-mindedness, he acquires extraordinary powers which enable him to perform miracles. Similarly, the single-minded devotion of Sheel Kaur earned her the divine benediction. When she sat down for prayers, she was feeling helpless with no hope for any help. However, her only concern was to breathe her last in a state of communion with God. But, the loved Lord of the devotees, set afoot awe-inspiring natural forces like rain, storm, hails, lightning and earthquake to save her. The muslims also attribute miraculous powers to their holy word and their Scriptures contain many accounts of the manner in which some innocent persons’ sufferings at the hands of the tyrants had been ultimately saved by God. That evening the ‘Jamadar’ and his soldiers had been talking about such accounts of which the effect was all the more accentuated by excessive doses of liquor. The dark hours of the night, the clouds, the rain, the lightning

and the storm all had combined to create an awful atmosphere which became all the more terrifying with the tremors of the earth. When the Qazi and the 'Jamadar' had run towards the tree for shelter, there was a lightning. It so happened that the lightning which usually falls on the trees fell on the very tree under which they were standing, as a result of which they were standing, as a result of which they were killed. Those of their colleagues who, out of fear, were sitting inside did not immediately come to know about the death of their 'Jamadar' because of the grim struggle that was then being waged between the natural forces like rain, storm and lightning etc.

As the piety and divine devotion of Sheel Kaur invoked the Lord's love, some of the helpless drunkards, lying in fear, got killed with lightning. In the morning, when the soldiers and the prisoners came out of their shelters, they saw four of the soldiers lying dead, having been stricken by lightning. Two others were so much frightened that they could not move. It were these two who ultimately related the happenings of the previous night to those who had been sitting indoors. All of them were taken aback by what they heard. One of the 'Havaldars' assumed the duty of acting 'Jamadar' and after burying the dead bodies, they moved ahead. They were now so much afraid of Sheel Kaur that they did not dare to harm her. On the other hand, they were rather inclined to sympathize with her. At first they had a mind to disclose everything out, the thought that they would be condemned as cowards by the people, prevented them from doing so. Therefore, the tragic episode of the strike of lightning alone was told.

Sheel Kaur came to know about the happenings of the previous night through overhearing the soldiers talking among themselves. She thanked God for saving her life

and her honour. "but for God's help, I would have been totally ruined", she felt.

By that time, like the scorching heat of summer noon, Mir Mannu's reign of terror in Punjab was at it highest pitch. There was not a single town or a village in which the Sikh could live safely and as such, they had to seek sheiter in jungles and hills. Those of them who got caught were mercilessly put to death. Whenever and wherever the Sikhs were captured, they were sent to Lahore where they were put to death according to Muslim code.

When a nation falls from the high ideals of a true religion, it uses religion only as a cover to do highly irreligious acts. Those truly religious are always simple and un-assuming while irreligious always pretend to be very pious. During the last days of the Mughal rule, more often than not, the then rulers of Punjab used religion as an instrument for the advancement of nothing but irreligion, because, while pretending to rule in the name of religion, they were, in actual practice, tyrannizing over the innocent people. The opportunists and the *sycophants* supported the government for selfish interests and thus enlarged the scope of oppression. They would often join Mir Mannu to offer public prayers, but while they solicited divine favours for themselves, they never thought of showing the same compassions and considerations to others. Theirs were only lip prayers and as such could not propitiate the Lord because in actual practice they took pleasure in tyrannizing over people, whom they condemned as infidels. True religion is something totally different.

About twenty Sikhs, the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh, with their hands and feet tied, were made to stand in line in an open space. They looked like caged lions. A seemingly pious person, with a long grey beard, who

sincerely believed himself to be very compassionate, tried to persuade them to accept Islam in a very sweet voice.

However, neither waves of sweet words nor threats had any effect on the Sikhs who stood firm like rocks in the sea. Just as a gem remains a gem even if it happens to fall in mud, similarly, a true Sikh always remains a Sikh no matter in whatever company is he thrown and how great threats are made to him. When the persuasion failed to make them forsake their religion, then, at a signal from Mir Mannu, three or four persons came forward who were the very personification of darkness. Like a dark night, accompanied at times by grey clouds, they were loaded with pots of oil and bales of cotton. These '*Jallads*' wrapped the Sikhs in the cotton in the same manner in which the '*Poorbias*' make idols of '*Hanuman*' on the eve of the Holi festival. The hands and the feet of the Sikhs were tied to a distant peg to prevent them from moving. Just as oil is offered to a bridegroom at the time of his riding the mare, similarly, oil was sprinkled on the Sikhs. The grey cotton turned yellowish, like the robes of Krishna, by the oil and Sikhs, the beloved sons of the Guru, looked like bridegrooms riding the Earth Mare. Instead of the strings of flowers, they were wearing the chains. Strange indeed was this marriage procession. There was nobody around to sing the marriage songs. Therefore, the Sikhs themselves started singing the holy hymns in place of marriage songs:

"To Thy will, O Lord, I shall gladly submit.

Nanak craves for Thy Name's sweet gift."

The spectators were wonder-struck at the sight. They had expected that in the face of the terrible death, the Sikhs would beg for mercy. But, little did they realize that

they were the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh who are never afraid and never beg for mercy.

Khalsaji, aren't you touched by the fearlessness, the bravery and the firmness of the faith of your forefathers? Doesn't the flood of tears gush forth through your eyes tearing down your granitelike carelessness? Just mark, how firm and steadfast these valiant souls were in their Faith. Like a dutiful and chaste wife, they were always ready to sacrifice themselves at the altar of Truth. They were the worthy Sikhs who, forsaking their homes and hearths, were every-ready to die for the sake of their religious convictions. The whole Panth has ever drawn inspiration from these courageous sons of Guru Gobind Singh who upheld the cause of their Faith even at the cost of their lives. Their valiant example has ever helped their descendants to be more steadfast in their convictions, and to sacrifice themselves for their religion. It was the courage and convictions of the brave souls which emancipated India from the tyranny of the later Mughals. Blessed indeed were these brave Sikhs. They hardened themselves against all forms of tortures, braved all attempts to kill them and frustrated all plans to exterminate them root and branch. Death, for them, was like the Nectar. To tread on the edge of a sword was for them like drinking the Nectar of Immortality. The more were they tortured and tyrannized over, the bolder did they grow like lions. They always found new life in death.

Let us now see as to what did happen to these Sikhs prisoners. Straws, sticks, bark of trees and broken baskets were placed around them and set on fire in the hope that as

heat and smoke reached the Sikhs they would be obliged to beg for mercy. The smoke going to their heads always causes a state of dizziness. However, the Sikhs began to recite the holy hymns and refused to be cowed down by the danger even as it was drawing closer and closer. For sometime they did manage to retain consciousness and till then they continued to recite the Lord's Name. Thereafter, as the fire engulfed them their voice became still.

O god of fire, you may now do whatever you like and may make as many onslaughts on the sacred bodies of the Sikhs as you please. Nothing is going to be of any avail. The substance you were commissioned to destroy in them has already left their bodies. The precious article is no more there for which you have been tyrannizing over these innocent souls. The immortal soul is beyond the reach of fire or water and has already flown to the feet of the Holy Father. Despairing at last, the fire gave way, cooled down and appeared to repent with a face grown pale. In the end it turned into ashes and settled on the heaps of the bones. Flying with the wind, its flakes ultimately defiled its own head.



CHAPTER – XIII

After the fall of Lakhpat, Diwan Kaura Mal managed to bring about a reapproachment between the Sikhs and Mir Mannu who gave the area of Patti as a 'Jagir' to the Sikhs. For about three years thereafter, the Khaisa lived in peace which helped them to flourish. In 1808 Sambat (1751 A.D.) when Ahmad Shah invaded Punjab again, about thirty thousands Sikhs had then come to the help of Mir Mannu. For a couple of months they were engaged in this fight in which Diwan Kaura Mal got killed. When in 1809 (1752 A.D.) Ahmad Shah went back to Kandhar after installing Mir Mannu as his vassal at Lahore, he broke all agreements with the Sikhs whom he began to persecute once again. After Banda Bahadur, the Sikhs, who were actively engaged in fighting, did not marry and hence were known as *Bhujangis*. These '*Bhujangis*' now retired to the jungles or the marshes to escape from the wrath of Mir Mannu, while the married Sikhs living with families were caught and sent to Lahore where they were put to death after being subjected to various types of tortures. Some of the accounts of these unfortunate Sikhs have already been given. At the behest of the enemies of the Sikhs, Mir Mannu, now, did not, spare even the Sikhs women and their children. One such group of Sikh women had recently fallen into the hands of Mir Mannu and was imprisoned at a place near the Mosque where Bhai Taru Singh had been martyred. Sheel Kaur and her son, who had been brought to Lahore, were also lodged in this very prison. These women were not pale-faced, misguided, timid, deceitful or irreligious with

little love for their Guru. They were rather deeply religious with a firm belief in the oneness of God. They had no faith in any of the false rituals. They could not even dream of abdicating their Faith for the sake of worldly comforts. They were not the sort of mothers who, for the sake of begetting a son, would propitiate the graves or, the cemeteries or would fall a victim to withcraft. They were rather the mothers who would voluntarily send their sons to the battle fields; the wives who disdaining all fashions would rather see their husbands dead than return alive defeated in the battle field where they were sent with the exhortation.

“Be you brave my Lord and give a real fight,
Uphold thou thy honour matters not how tight.
In that shall ever lie, our honour and our glory.
And I shall then enjoy a wedlock real and hoary.”

They were the sisters who would bless thus their brothers going to war:

Fight bravely O Brother, do or be dead,
N’er show thy back, ev’n if you lose thy head.”

And they were the daughtes who, on hearing the news of their father’s martyrdom, would say:

“My father has become immortal,
Not to be born or die again,
I’d never be an orphan,
For, he’d live for ever and ever again.”

It was to test the conviction of these brave women that the divine will had called upon them to prove in practice what they had ever been proclaiming.

Torn apart from their husbands they had been thrown into prisons to suffer at the hands of tyrants who for days together let them rot in that condition. Once, in twenty four hours, each of them would get just a coarse loaf with

some water. They could neither take a bath nor have any facility to wash. They were not allowed to laugh or relax. Like the inmates of hell they were feeling very filthy and their children were crying with hunger. However it was amazing to find those, who had no children to support, voluntarily surrender a part of their food to those who had children to feed. Thus, they shared each other's sufferings and difficulties. They passed their days by reciting the holy hymns and meditating on their Guru. Meanwhile Mir Mannu issued an order that they should either accept Islam or grind at least one and a quarter maund of grain on pain of being whipped at failure to do so. Very soon after the formal proclamation of this order, hand-mills and the grains were placed before each of the prisoner. Taking this to be the divine will of the Lord, they offered prayers and decided to suffer it with courage and conviction. Those of them who had no children and came from rural areas managed to finish their job by the day-break, but, the comparatively richer women of the towns were very much hard put to it. Nevertheless, they tried to mitigate their sufferings by reciting the holy hymns and by recalling the tortures and tyrannies through which Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Arjan Dev had to pass. This forced labour was having a very telling effect on them. Their hands were blistered and their arm muscles got so much strained that it became difficult for them to move their arms. Some of these ladies were so much exhausted that their waists seemed to be unable to bear the weight of their bodies. Sheel Kaur was one such woman who had been brought up in comfort and who was used to a large number of maid servants who were always at her beck and call. She was now caught up in very agonizing condition for no other fault except her will to uphold her religion.

Her fair and comely arms had turned red and her face had faded with exhaustion. Seeing this her innocent child pleads thus with her, "Mother dear, please take a little rest and meanwhile, let me grind for a while." But, the motherly love did not allow her to give such a hard job to her son. However, when she was absolutely drained of all strength and her son was too insistent she did at last lift her hand from the mill. Her son, delicate like a rose, tried to work it but, could not and had to gasp for breath almost immediately. It is very difficult to imagine the agonizing conditions through which these women had to pass then. Those of them who were comparatively stronger and managed to finish their hard job, despite their own tiredness, readily offered a helping hand to the weakers among them. At times, two of them combined to grind together. Once, a healthier woman, Dhano by name, on seeing the condition of Sheel Kaur, started weeping and said to her, "Dear, you are just like 'Sundri'. That pious soul was also in great agony like you. However, she never lost heart. Alas, she died only a couple of days back." She related this to Sheel Kaur while offering her a helping hand.

After retiring from the day's hard labour these brave Sikh women would pray thus to God:

"O Immortal God, our Lord, bless us with thy faith. We may be weaker in body but our minds are strong through thy grace which has blessed us with sublime Truth and Righteousness. Please uphold the honour of Thy devotees. May we never lose our Faith, whatever the tortures. May we be dismembered like Bhai Mani Singh rather than forsake our convictions. May we be a sacrifice unto You, our Lord, the very embodiment of Truth and Love. May we rather lose our lives than

our Guru. May we lose everything than our religion. May we fall by the sword than fail for falsehood.”

Such prayers helped those ladies to withstand the tortures that were being perpetrated on them. Whenever a Turk tried to woo them or threaten them, they would react like lionesses. To pressurize them, they were denied even the meagre meals for a day or so. Thus, at times, they had to do the hard labour without even a morsel of food.

How can the agony of these conditions be appreciated by those who have four full meals a day and to digest which they have to take the aid of soda water and other digestive *elixirs*. What do they know about the pangs of hunger who, in the name of fasting, enjoy all sorts of dainty dishes? But the persons who have themselves undergone the agony of starvation would tearfully vouchsafe that hunger is worse than even death.

One day these Sikh women were severely whipped. However, having imbibed the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, they developed such a firm faith in the Ideals of Truth and Righteousness that they stood this torture most heroically.

One of the torturing ladies came from the same place to which the parents of Sheel Kaur belonged. As such, she was aware of the heroic manner in which her father had suffered martyrdom alongwith Tara Singh of Van. Sheel Kaur was her only daughter who was married off by her uncle to the son of Chuhar Mal in order to have a case decided in his favour. On seeing her sufferings, this lady could not help sympathizing with her and said to her;

“The child must take after its father in howsoever measure it may be. O my dear, how could you ever live in the house of a person like Chuhar Mal? I am

sure it must have been you who initiated your husband into Sikhism and made him suffer martyrdom. Your mother also died in great agony and now, like your parents, you too are caught in the whirlpool. The *progeny* of the Sikhs always reveal their true colour, sooner or later."

Although this lady had been deputed to tyrannize over the Sikh women, yet being after all a human being, she could not help sympathizing with Sheel Kaur. Going to the house of Chuhar Mal, she informed her mother-in-law about everything. The old lady who was already in great distress was extremely pained to learn all that. However, she was a woman of great wisdom and sound sagacity. Appeasing the Turk lady with money, she pleaded with her to help release her daughter-in-law as well as her grandson and bring them to her. The clever lady did try to take them out but her efforts could not succeed.

Amazed at the heroic steadfastness of the Sikh women, one day Mir Mannu personally came there to persuade them to renounce their religion. He met with a flat refusal. According to Giani Gain Singh: "Mir Mannu told them that if they accepted Islam, they would be provided with all the comforts of the world. However, they firmly refused the offer saying, 'God in his mercy has blessed us with the True Faith in order to redeem us. All other religions are false having renounced the godly way. Why then should we forsake the genuine Gem of our Faith for the sake of a false one? What is the use of living in the world after abdicating our religion? As far as physical afflictions, distress, hunger and pain are concerned, one has to suffer them in accordance with one's past deeds, no matter to what religion one may happen to belong'".

On hearing this answer Mir Mannu flew into a rage and said, "God knows what stuff these infidels are made of? Their convictions are as tough as their physical constitution."

Mir Mannu issued some new orders. At once a couple of soldiers rushed forward, surrounded the prisoners and snatched the children from their mothers. They would now throw up a child in the air like a ball and then take it on a spear as it tended to drop. The spear pierced through the child and writhing in anguish and crying pain it died in great distress. The scene has been described in the *Panth Parkash* in these words:

"Snatching children from their mothers,
And, willfully right in their faces,
In the air they were thrown,
Pulling roots, thus, their own
Many were tkane on the spear,
And killed in a way barbaric sheer."

One can well imagine the fate of the mothers in whose very presence their children, yea, their very dear children were thus mercilessly killed and they had to watch the horrible sight in a state of utter helplessness, having first been tied down. In the state of such agony, even tears dry up in eyes. However, the brave Sikh mothers bore it all most heroically and prayed to God, 'O God! Pray, redeem Thy children in Thy lap which is ever cosy and comfortable.'

At the turn of Shee! Kaur's son, Mir Mannu was so completely un-nerved by the sight of her beautiful face that he suddenly calmed down like a fire on which cold water had been thrown. Thus, for the child had escaped

through the efforts of the lady referred to above, who had been managing to save him on one pretext or the other. But alas, she could not conceal the illumined soul under the thin well of her cleverness for a long time. Let us now see how Mir Mannu deals with these individuals. After all the atrocities he had committed on the Sikhs, he could not be expected to show any mercy to them. His sick and paralyzed mind could not harbour any feeling of compassion, mercy or sympathy towards any human being, much less the Sikhs. As such, he could not possibly treat Sheel Kaur differently. But, just as every cloud has a silver lining. Similarly, sometimes some good comes out of an evil act also. When Mir Mannu saw the beautiful face of Sheel Kaur, his wrath gave way to lust and a desire to make her his Begum (wife) welled up in him. He issued immediate orders that she should be sent to his palace alongwith her son.

Wazir: My Lord, when all the tortures and tyrannies including the killing of their children have failed to induce them to accept Islam, do you really expect her to do so?

Mannu: Do you think these women will be able to hold on to their religion? I just wanted them to renounce it voluntarily and I shall wait for some more days. If they are still adamant, I shall forcibly marry them off to Muslims. This moon-faced woman would receive such a treatment right to-day, because I am going to marry her. As for the rest, starve them for the night and throw the pieces of their children into their laps.



CHAPTER -- XIV

Sheel Kaur and her son were brought to the royal palace where their bonds were removed. A number of maid servants were deputed to attend on them and they were provided with every comfort, including the silken robes and valuable ornaments. Some of the elderly women tried to persuade Sheel Kaur to agree to the proposal of renouncing of her Faith and becoming the Queen of Punjab. 'Your writ shall then run from Attock to Sutlej and people all over the country shall hold you in very high esteem', they told her. With her head cast down, Sheel Kaur was sitting like a Jessamine plant surrounded by 'Ber' trees. She was feeling extremely pained at these words but unfortunately no body cared to peep into her bleeding heart.

She felt very much pained at what her unwanted so-called friends had suggested. At their un-sought-for suggestions, tear-drops continued to fall from her eyes. The more they tried to *beguile* her with promises of worldly wealth and comforts, deeper became her agony almost strangulating her. She had so far braved all sorts of tortures and tyrannies and had refused to be cowed down by them, but now she was very much upset and agitated at the words of these people who, in all humility were trying to allure her with the prospects of power and *pelf*. However, she was determined, more than ever before, to face this new challenge. Weighed down by utter helplessness, she, at first, did feel like losing ground from under her feet. But, that did not mean that any of the allurements had

an effect on Sheel Kaur. What she was worried about was the fact that the enemy instead of physical torutres, was now trying to cause her mental agony by wooing her. Just as all the arms of the enemy had failed to instil fear in the mind of Sheel Kaur. Similarly, the approaches of love could not shake her from her resolve. However, she was very much worried and was thinking about the manner in which she might save her honour. She was all the time aware of the danger inherent in these seemingly sweet overtures and was trying to compose herself in order to be able to think clearly. Just as, sometimes, a devotee, while meditating, gets lost after the manner of a diver cleansing a well, similarly, in utter disappointment, her nerve seemed to fail her and she lost all consciousness.

The Sikhs of to-day, men and women both, must learn a lesson from Sheel Kaur. The enmity of the Turks had failed to cut ice against the Sikhs. However, new religions are now posing new dangers to our Faith through sweet talks and all types of inducements and allurements. Beware of their love and their gifts, otherwise they are bound to engulf you. About a hundred years ago, Sikh women, like Sheel Kaur, had recognized this danger and had faced it squarely. Let us learn a lesson from such devout women to be firm in our Faith and not allow any inducements, sympathies or aggressions to deflect us from our religion.*

O ye dear Sikh women, grieving widows and suffering wives of the wayward husbands, the world being full of deceit and fraud, there is need for you to be very alert. Books like 'Sundri' will enable you to safeguard your religious convictions against all types of aggression, but,

* At the time of writing this book, the Christians were trying to allure innocent persons to their religion through all types of inducements.

you must also be beware of sweet overtures, which are dangers in disguise. Human life is a rare boon and as such, it is our primary duty to uphold our honour and our Faith. You being tender-hearted, the imposters try to beguile you with various baits like appeasement and offers of help in your difficulties. But, like Sheel Kaur, you must be firm in your convictions. Besides such imposters sometimes close relatives, domestic servants and near kith and kin also try to play this game. Always be on your guard against such dangers in this dark age. Worldly comforts are always of a fleeting nature and their end invariably is very bitter. The righteousness, on the other hand, bestows the blessings of both the worlds, here and hereafter. Therefore, always be very virtuous and dwell in its happiness and comfort. Beware of evil no matter if it comes in the form of a friend or a foe, because poisonous snake is always dangerous whether it comes out from within the house or from without. Now don't be under the impression that Sheel Kaur was either afraid or beguiled. She was a lion-hearted woman. Though tender hearted, yet she was gifted with a strong common sense which convinced her that new danger in the form of sweet overtures would have to be faced with tact and wisdom rather than with force. Therefore, like Sheel Kaur, every one of us should be brave and wise enough to guard ourself against both awe and affection of the enemy.

Sheel Kaur was fully aware that it was impossible for her to escape from that place and was equally difficult to elude the enemy. As such she was at a loss to hit upon a plan to find a way to combat the impending danger. Her son, her main stay in pain and pleasure both, sitting close by, was aware of the enemy danger but, was unable to appreciate the mental agony of her mother. He was

puzzled by the growing grief of her mother at the sight of the articles of luxury presented to her with affected joy. Throwing his arms around her neck, he asked her tenderly, 'My dear mother, why are you so upset. Why don't you feel glad that the Guru has relieved us of our difficulties'. She was so much touched by the innocence of the child that she began to weep. Tearfully, she hugged him closely and placing his head on her bosom began to caress him. At this heart-rending sight all the maid servants left and reported the matter to the Nawab. Left alone, Sheel Kaur, tried to gather her thoughts and courage. Her condition then was like that of a wooden piece which swims to the surface from under water after breaking away from an iron weight tied to it. At the fall of dusk, the mother and the child closed the door of the room and started reciting the evening prayers (REHRAS). Blessed indeed is God whose prayers had such an amazing effect on Sheel Kaur that she regained her courage and the Sikh Spirit. Her heart which had lost all hope, now regained its strength just as a bereaved person feels consoled on meeting a lost brother. Sheel Kaur now suddenly had a feeling that God was pervading all around her and would offer her all help like a true friend. She gained courage in the conviction that God would not forsake her in her difficulties and would safeguard her honour by leading her out of the impending danger. The feelings of gratitude and self-confidence came to abide in her heart like the divine guards sent by the Lord. Thus, just when Sheel Kaur had lost all hope of any support from any quarter, God Himself came to her rescue at her prayer:

"When all hopes are lost
And all supports are gone,

Harm can touch us not,
Remember if we God.”

She was so much overwhelmed by the feelings of gratitude that in a state of happiness and hunger (for a union with God) tears began to roll down her cheeks. All through the night, Sheel Kaur was engaged in offering prayers of gratitude. To mitigate their distress, people generally resort to counting of stars at night. Instead of treating them as mere stones and balls of fire, Sheel Kaur looked upon them as sources of light which helped her to meditate on God. Thus, she passed her night by dwelling upon the virtues of God and His innate nature to uphold the honour of His devotees. Great is the Lord who came to her help. Her heart thus cleared of all doubts was now filled with new God-given courage. She was now able to think clearly about the ways to come unscathed from the impending danger.



CHAPTER – XV

The wife of Mir Mannu, Murad Begum whom many historians refer to as 'Mughlani Begum', was as clever a woman as she was beautiful. She had complete sway over her husband and had manoeuvred to rise to the position of the first Queen. On the aforesaid night, Mir Mannu had his drinks in her first floor room. His wife made him play to her tune and in a state of intoxication, he told her everything about Sheel Kaur and also about his intention to make her his Begum. Mughlani Begum, on hearing this became bitter with jealousy. On one pretext or the other, she managed to administer more and more liquor to her husband, till by midnight he lost all consciousness. Now, she came out on the outer balcony and sitting there began to chalk out plans to avert the impending tragedy. After deep thought, she stealthily came to that part of the place where Sheel Kaur had been lodged. Although the door of her room was closed, yet, through a slit, she could see that a lamp was burning and Sheel Kaur was engaged in prayers. She was somewhat satisfied to find that the gentle and innocent lady did not appear to be interested in the marriage. In fact, she seemed to regard as a tragedy to avert which, she was invoking the divine help. Fully convinced that it would not be difficult to tackle this lady, she went to sleep.

The sun had hardly risen in the sky to cast its sharp gaze on the drowsing and pulsating people, when Murad Begum also opened her shaper than the sun eyes and cast angry glances at her husband, who was half drunk and half asleep. She rose from her bed and fanned him again to

sleep. After she had taken her bath and dressed herself, she woke her husband and helped him to dress. After serving him some breakfast she sent him to the court for official work, attended by two of her trusted maid servants who, after a little distance were replaced by two bodyguards enjoying the Begum's confidence. While the Nawab got busy in the court attending to the difficult and complex problems of Punjab, the Begum came over to Sheel Kaur and, very soon, succeeded in winning her confidence.

Begum: My dear sister of the previous birth, you have met me after ages. Please don't be upset and be assured that we do belong to each other. I am convinced that we have been sisters in the previous life. Unfortunately, perhaps, because of my unmeritorious acts I have been born in a Turk family and am now obliged to live with it. Late last evening when I learnt about your being here, I was shocked. I didn't know what to do. Knowing as I do that the daughters of the Sikhs uphold their honour at all costs, I was worried about your personal safety. Drowned in such thoughts, I came over here stealthily to see for myself. At the very first sight of you, sisterly love welled up in my heart. I am more than convinced that you are my sister and as such, I have resolved to save your honour even at the cost of my life. Administering excessive drinks, I made my husband so unconscious last night that he forgot all about you.

Sheel Kaur: (In great humility) May God bless you with added power and pelf for having taken pity on a humble person like me.

Begum: My dear sister, don't you ever think like that. The times no doubt are very hard when upright people are coming to harm. It is only through cunning and cleverness that we manage to live comfortably. Know that you being

God-oriented cannot approve of such a thing but we have to be worldly wise and as such believe in acquiring power and pelf by hook or by crook. You are a really pious lady and I feel like kissing your feet.

Sheel Kaur: O God, Respected Queen, you are the rulers of the land. Although we are gifted with lion's courage, yet, at present, we are your prisoners and hence, are completely at your mercy. I am obliged to you for your assurance to save my honour and hence shall be glad to render you any service.

Begum: I only wish you to take me as your sister.

Sheel Kaur: How can it be possible when you are the Queen and I am your prisoner? Sisterly relations can be established only among equals and with mutual free will.

Begum: No, my dear sister, don't bother about such things. You are essentially an upright lady belonging, apparently, to some family gifted with piety and plenty. You are no more a prisoner and as such must accept me as your sister. You are a virtuous woman and through you I may be able to imbibe some of the Sikh values.

Sheel Kaur: I don't think I am worth all that.

Begum: Please don't be so self-effusive. If you do not accept me as your sister, I will not take even a drop of water.

Sheel Kaur: O blessed God. Please do not force me like that. I am even otherwise at your service for any honourable cause.

Begum: If that is the case, then (her hand reached out for her dagger.)

Sheel Kaur: O my God, what is this? (Seizing her hand) I have no hesitation in accepting you as my sister, but, being free and all powerful, you are in a position to honour your commitments while it may be very difficult for me, a mere

prisoner, to do so. Friendship last only between equal and free individuals. I Sincerely wish you well but don't force me to call you a sister.

Begum: (Holding out the dagger) well, if you don't agree then.....

Sheel Kaur: (Catching hold of her hand) No my sister, Don't you do that; I am ready to say anything.

At the very mention of the word 'Sister', the Begum hugged her to her bosom and began to weep. 'My dear sister', she said', there is no one to share my grief, inspite of the fact that, besides my maids, there are many around me who profess to love me for their own selfish ends. It is only to-day that a soul like your has met me through God's grace. I offer Him many thanks for having taken pity on me.

Sheel Kaur: It is rather I who should thank God for having blessed me with your friendship especially at a time when there is no body to share my sufferings. I pray to Him to grant me strength to keep my pledge taken to-day. I urge upon you as well to give me a solemn commitment.

Begun: Please do let me know, dear sister, I promise to stand by you through thick and thin.

Sheel Kaur: You must promise to save my honour during my detention here. Even if I have to give my life for this cause, you like a sister, shall have to stand by me.

Begum: In the name of Allah (God) I promise to safeguard your life and honour till my last breath.

Sheel Kaur: (Closing her eyes) Blessed, blessed are you, O my God, the Creator, I beg for your help to redeem me. Let my husband also be saved and united with me.

Begum: Sister, where is your husband and how were you separated?

Sheel Kaur: The landlord of a village situated on the bank of river Chenab belaboured him almost to death and then imprisoned him. I am not aware of what happened to them thereafter. However, on the eve of my departure to this place I did see him alive, though I couldn't talk to him. (Her eyes were filled with tears)

Begum (Sponging her eyes) Please do not weep my sister. I promise to send for your husband and would not allow any harm to be done to him. Take it from me that your troubles are now over.

Sheel Kaur: I feel assured by your affections. But, although last night I was saved by your good offices, yet how long, after all, I would be safe at this place?

Begum: No body can dare to cast an evil eye on you, my dear sister, as long as I am alive.

Sheel Kaur: May you be blessed with good fortune and with His fear.

Begum: Dear sister, you need have no fears if you care to follow my instruction.

After these words the Begum left deputing two maid servants to attend on Sheel Kaur. After taking bath the mother and the son had their meals and then changed their dresses. The maid servants took away the dirty clothes on the pretext of washing them and handed them over to the Begum. The mother and the son passed the day in a mood of thanks giving to the Lord. Immediately after sunset, under orders of the Begum, Sheel Kaur was shifted from that hall to a distant first floor room alongwith the attending maids.

As the darkness spread after sunset, the Nawab quietly had some drinks in a small room. As his head reeled under the influence of intoxicants and as he lost all sense, he staggered towards the room where he had Sheel Kaur imprisoned. As he stepped into the room, he saw her

sitting in the same dirty clothes with a veil drawn over her face. He was very much annoyed, rebuked the maids and turned them out of the room. He now tried to talk to her in an incoherent and stammering voice. Concealed under the veil and utterly shy, she refused to submit, at which the Nawab drew out his sword. She fell at his feet with folded hands. Like a victorious cock, the Nawab said boastfully, "Do you see how have I made the wife of Sikh submit to my orders. (stammeringly) I would now make you my Begum and then you shall be known as the Queen of Punjab." When the Nawab was talking this rot and was half asleep in a state of intoxication, the woman, meanwhile, changed her clothes but not before someone had put out the lamp unobtrusively. The night passed of as if in a trice, like the instant disappearance of a ray of lightning at mid-day or like the idea of evil from a Yogi's mind that might have welled up in a bad company. The fire was very soon reduced to ashes but it hadn't burnt anything.

At day break, the Begum came to Sheel Kaur glowing like the spring sun. Sheel Kaur was engaged in prayers after the recitation of Japji. Both the friends were happy to meet each other. The Begum congratulated her for herself having succeeded in saving her honour last night. She also assured her that she had arranged the things in such a way that her honour now shall ever be safe and she would be able to live like a lotus flower in water. "No body now dare cost an evil eye on you." Said she.

Sheel Kaur: My dear sister, I am extremely obliged to you. You are just like a mother to me. I am grateful to the Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh) who has blessed you with mercy. But sister dear, may I know how could you manage to save my honour.

Begum: This is something which cannot be explained.

Sheel Kaur: I will not insist however, if possible do let me know.

Begum: Sister, in view of the mutual confidence we share there is no point in keeping anything back from you. My husband is still under the impression that he has been able to own you as his Queen. But, he has been duped by me. Wearing your clothes, sitting like you and pretending to talk like you, I was able to play a trick on my husband who because of darkness, failed to recognize me. The darkness of night and his drunkenness would enable me to beguile him for sometime more. By that time I shall be able to plan something else. The darkness of night spreads its cover on good and evil both and treats them alike. It is the house of goodwill and has the nature of rain. It does not discriminate against anybody be he a murderer, a dacoit, a thief, a saint or a yogi; it does not expose them. The sun and the moon, on the other hand, expose everybody. Not only do they themselves behold the evil deeds of the people but, like talkative persons, also expose them to the whole world. The stealthy eyes of the stars also expose people though in a whispering way. The gentle darkness takes everybody under its cover, and tries to shield them. It does not care to see evil in others nor does it allow any one else to do so. Just as a gentleman, on seeing somebody stripped, lowers his eyes, similarly the darkness, with its eyes closed, keeps the wheels of its dark chariot on the move without caring to dwell upon the merits or demerits of others. This very darkness has saved your honour, my dear sister. Therefore, darkness, for me, is like a true saint, nay, it is the very embodiment of God. Just as God beholds every thing but does not scandalize and causes rain to fall in equal measures on the fields of good and

evil both, similarly, the darkness weighs against none. The darkness in a way is more merited than even the God. God beholds everything, past, present and the future, although he is kind and compassionate. The darkness, however, refuses to see anything much less judge the evil saying, when everybody must suffer according to his/her actions then, why should I care to dwell upon anybody's good or evil and there by discriminate against one or the other.'

Sheel Kaur was very much up-set at hearing these clever and disparaging remarks against God, and controlling herself with great difficulty said, "My dear sister, howsoever you have managed, I am very much obliged to you. However, if you really take me as your sister then please be advised to desist from uttering any thing unbecoming the glory of God in future.

Begum: You are right. We are also religiously enjoined upon not to do so.

When the Begum had left after this frank exchange of views, Sheel Kaur together with her son, prayed thus before God with folded hands, "O Divine Father, I have inadvertantly heard some disparaging remarks against You, pray excuse me for this sin and purify my heart. I am not only helpless but am also a prisoner. May I be freed through Thy grace."

At that time, as Mir Mannu was sitting in his court, one of his intelligence men came to inform him that a band of Sikhs was hiding at a particular place. He immediately marched thither with some of his army units and courtiers after sending a word to the Begum, that he would be away for four or five days. On hearing this the Begum and Sheel Kaur were both relieved of a great part of their worries.

Enjoying himself and hunting enroute, the Nawab finally reached the place where he intended to hunt for men. Close to village PINDORI¹ there was a large sugar-cane field in which a number of Sikhs, young and old, women and children had been forced to take shelter. In those days these helpless people had to pass their days in jungles and marshes and very often they had to go without food even for days together. The extremities of weather and the thorny bushes had torn their clothes which hung like the strings of a canopy over the head of a bridegroom. They had been obliged to take shelter at his place and were engaged in prayers when the soldiers pounced upon them. The village people had also collected there and there was a loud hue and cry, as a result. The mothers and the sisters of the people hiding in the field were bewailing. Some of the sikh ladies, including the mother and grandmother of Rattan Singh Bhangu had been given shelter by the grandson of Dadoo Ram, a Bbairagi Mahant, in his house disguised in saffron clothes. At the loud and anguished cry of the villagers, Mir Mannu's horse got startled and he fell down. As the horse ran in panic, Mir Mannu's foot got entangled in the stirrup and he continued to be dragged along. Struck against the hard and uneven surface of the rough plateau, his head which was like a big melon, was soon split apart right upto the nose. A trail of blood was left behind where he had been dragged and it looked like the lengthy roll of his evil acts.

This is how Mir Mannu lost his life². When his dead

-
1. According to Rattan Singh Bhangu it was Pindori, while Giani Gian Singh refers to it as Mulan Pur.
 2. According to Khazain-i-Amra, Mir Mannu died on Muharam 7, 1167 Hijri. Umadut-twarikh believes it to be Katak Sudi 9, 1810 Bikrami. These dates correspond to 3rd and 4th Nov. 1753 A.D. Latif's 1851 is therefore not correct and neither is Gokal Chand Narang's 1752

body was brought to the capital by his compatriots, the news of his death spread like oil on the surface of water. The army units whose arrears of pay were outstanding for the last many months, took hold of the dead body and refused to hand it over for burial to Murad Begum until she paid a sum of rupees three Lakhs to clear those arrears. All the night through, the Begum was engaged in collecting the sum which she paid to the army next morning. It was only then that the dead body was ultimately handed over to her. It was then cremated with full state honours.



CHAPTER – XVI

Let us turn our attention to Bijay Singh and the experiences he had during this period. As already said, the Sikhs, were passing their days in jungles, marshes and in hilly fastnesses and were biding for an opportune moment to capture, hit back and gain power. The poor and the labourers among them, who were not in a position to join these bands were really hard put to and were in great distress. The bands of the Khals occasionally came out of their hide-outs to chastise the tyrants especially, now, when persons like Bijay Singh apprised these bands of the Sikhs about the atrocities being committed upon innocent Sikh women and children, a wave of anger ran through their ranks and they decided to make an assault on Lahore. The band of Karora Singh was the first to march towards Lahore like a river in flood. By this time Bijay Singh too had come to know through Sabar Shah's men that Sheel Kaur was also among the group of Sikh women who were being tortured at Lahore. He couldn't restrain himself and leaving behind love-lorn Sabar Shah decided to join Karora Singh's band about whose intended march to Lahore he had already learnt. Immediately after joining the band, Bijay Singh earned recognition for his prowess. Every body was full of admiration for this son of rich parents who, forsaking all comforts of life, had voluntarily adopted a very difficult path for the sake of the poor and the persecuted. He was greeted like a real brother in sad contrast to the Sikhs of to-day who are devoid of all such feelings for their nation's prestige. A Sikh to-day treats a fellow Sikh like a complete stranger,

while in earlier days, a Sikh was immensely pleased to meet fellow Sikh and even without any formal introduction was ever ready to offer him all help in hour of need.

The Khalsa was now on their march towards Lahore. Bijay Singh was in charge of a small group besides catering to some of the needs of his fellow Sikhs. Marching along a comparatively safer route, the Khalsa reached the outskirts of Lahore one day at about dawn, and immediately attacked the place where their womenfolk were passing their days in great distress. Those of the guards who tried to resist were cut to pieces, while the rest ran away in panic. The victorious Sikh Sardars entered the underground cell after pulling down a small wall. When they saw the miserable plight of their womenfolk they were beside themselves with rage. The decomposed pieces of the children's bodies were scattered all around while their mothers were bound hands and feet. Some of them had been tied to the pillars while still others were either already dead or were on their last breaths. Although their clothes were torn and their faces were pale like that of Majnu, yet, like the proverbial stone of a dead snake there was about them an aura of brightness imparted to them by the melodious and the holy word WAHEGURU that was being uttered by them. Bijay Singh and his men cut the bonds of these prisoners: Those of the sisters whose torn garments were insufficient to cover them fully were provided with sheets of cloth by Karora Singh and his companions. Such was the sublime conduct of the past Sikhs sardars. In sharp contrast, innumerable families are being ruined to-day through drunkenness and craze for fashion. Still others are frittering away their ancestral properties in useless luxuries and are turning paupers.

It was a treat to watch the sentiments of piety and humility on the faces of the Sikhs and of gratitude and praise on those of their womenfolk. The slogans of SAT SRI AKAL, WHAEGURU JI KI FATEH and DHAN SATGURU were being raised all around. Although Lahore then was ridden with strife in the wake of the death of Mir Mannu and the resultant conflicts among the Begum, the courtiers and the army, yet even then, it was really a bold attempt to dare to assault the fortified Mughal Capital and to kill their people in that way. Each of the Sikhs now carried one of the ladies on the horse with himself and slipped away after they had set on fire the dead bodies and the pieces of the dead children by collecting them at a place. They halted in a jungle at a distance. They had purchased some eatables from a wayside village. They took off their waist-bands and had their bath in the river Ravi, flowing close by. After almost ages, the Sikh women could find water for use. The meals were prepared and after serving the ladies first and then the rest, Karora Singh and Bijay Singh had their portion. According to the Sikh tenets the leaders of the Nation (Panth) deem it an act of honour to serve others. The Sikh women were sent to their respective families. Those of them who had been left with no kith and kin were allowed to stay in the band (jatha) to redeem themselves by serving their brethren-in-distress. Bijay Singh could not know the whereabouts of Sheel Kaur. Although sometimes back he had heard that Mir Mannu had forcibly taken her away to his palace and that he had made her his queen, yet no body believed in these talks. Bijay Singh was fully convinced that if his wife was alive, then she would uphold her honour at all costs and in case she was dead then she must have died with her honour intact. It is impossible for a Sikh woman to live with violated honour. People in general survive as

Long as there is life in them. For the Sikhs, however, their honour is their very life. They live with honour and die with honour. No Sikh, be a man or a woman, would ever like to live without honour.

It is because the Sikhs love the holy Name of God and because Holy GURBANI has always been their mainstay that they believe in the dignity of man. Right from the days of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur and the Sikh Sardars, the Sikhs have adhered to the practice of reciting daily prayers. It is, therefore, inevitable that they should be gifted with qualities of truthfulness, sacrifice, goodwill and human fellow feeling.

When the news of the death of Mir Mannu became widely known, the Sikhs came out of their hiding places like sun at the end of the night. As a result there was a great upheaval throughout the length and breadth of the land. Persons who had been responsible for killing Sikh women and children from urban areas were the first to be chastised and punished at the hands of the Sikhs. According to Panth Parkash the following persons and places came in for particular chastisement at the hands of the Sikhs, for their inimical role against them. 1. Sarai (inn) Nuru Din 2. Kot 3. Majitha 4. Jandia 5. Neetha 6. The family of Karma Chhina 7. The village of the Ram Randhawa 8. Gharian 9. Dila Jat of Saidewala 10. Nathahu Panch of Bhoorewala 11. Akal Dass Mahant of Hendal 12. Ismail Khan of Mandia 13. Ranghars of Butala 14. Jats of Bundala 15. Aulia Khan 16. Hasna Bhati 17. Gulaba of Mahalpur 18. Phagwara 19. Residents of Thaur 20. A number of informers 21. Panches of Naushehra.

The Sikhs, thus, freed men at many places and punished the culprits responsible for tyrannizing over

them. They were now all set to bring the land under their control. But they had reckoned without the cunning Murad Begum. Immediately after the death of her husband she succeeded in enlisting the support of the courtiers, the Omerahs and the ministers and thus managed to put her son on the throne and assume the reins of power in her own hands as his guardian. She sent secret emissaries to Durrani, the Emperor of Kabul, requesting him to appoint her son as the Viceroy of Punjab with herself as his regent. A similar request to the Emperor of Delhi was also sent by her. Both the Emperors ratified in writing the appointment of her son, Amin-ud-din, as the Viceroy of Punjab under her regency. The Kings of Kabul and Delhi both regarded Lahore as a part of their respective kingdoms. As such, anyone aspiring for paramountcy in Punjab had to keep both of them in good humour. After assuming the reins of power the Begum tried to tighten her hold on the State. For such a purpose, first of all, she ordered Momim Khan to restore law and order by curbing the activities of the Sikhs. Bhikhari Khan was appointed as a minister, a golden mosque built by him is still standing at Lahore. He was a very handsome and shrewd person under whose guidance, the Begum was able to assert herself like her late husband.

Sheel Kaur and her son had been allowed to stay in the royal palace. When Mir Mannu had left for his hunting expedition, she had planned to eliminate the mother and the son before his return, but before she executed this plan she heard about the death of her husband and her attention was absorbed by other important matters. And now the presence of her adopted sister became a source of great strength to her. Having been convinced about the soundness of her judgement and the loftiness of her

character, the begum began to consult her in all important State matters. Very often, she was highly pleased when the sound advice given by Sheel Kaur, helped her solve intricate state issues. As a result, she held Sheel Kaur in very high esteem and had developed genuine sympathy for her. The Begum was also fond of Bhikhari Khan's company in her palace after the adjournment of the court. Sheel kaur strongly advised her against this practice; otherwise, according to her, it would not be possible for her to keep her rule intact. Acting on this advice, though reluctantly, the Begum realized that the courtiers too had been feeling sore about it. Because of such sagacity, Sheel Kaur, though still a prisoner, yet enjoyed a very honourable place. But, even then she was never in a happy mood and was always feeling distressed. The continued separation from her husband was weighing so heavily on her mind that but for her firm faith in God, she would have died fo grief. Her body and soul were being kept together by her faith to abide int he will of God. Just as the plucked flowers kept in cool water do survive for some days though not with the same bloom, similarly, Sheel Kaur with her faith in God, managed to keep up her composure although inwardly she was worn by grief. The Begum was fully aware of her condition and as such, was keen to find out her husband so that her worries could be mitigated. She was also aware that she herself would also be benefited as a result, because, a more sincere friend would be hard to find. She called for information about Bijay Singh from the chief of the area where Sabar Shah was known to live. It was learnt through him that Bijay Singh had joined the Sikh 'Jathas'. The Begum now

deputed some of her own men to find him out, giving them details of his physical build-up.

As told above, the Sikhs at that time had become very active, for which reason, the Begum had deputed roving units of the army under the command of Momin Khan to curb them. After a series of small undecisive skirmishes the Sikhs came into conflict with the Jats near Gujranwala whom Momin Khan had instigated against them. The Sikhs lost some of their men, but the Jats were completely routed. In this conflict Bijay Singh gave a very good account of himself. But, in the thick of battle, he was wounded in the leg. Unmindful of the pain he continued fighting till his horse too was wounded as a result of which it fell into a ditch in which a Sikh and two Mohammedans had also fallen earlier, while fighting. This Sikh had killed many of his opponents when two Mughal soldiers fell upon him, in a desperate bid to kill him. When the swords of all the three were broken they were locked in a hand to hand fight. Till they got exhausted and fell in to this pit. The Sikh had already left for his heavenly abode while the two Turks were struggling for life when Bijay Singh fell there alongwith his horse. As the Turks breathed their last, Bijay Singh got unconscious. The Sikhs, meanwhile, had left the field after defeating the enemy and chastising the supporters. In great hurry of withdrawal, nobody took any notice of Bijay Singh who was lying face downward. He lay there all the night through, completely unconscious and with three dead bodies around him. His leg was tangled in the trappings of the dead horse.

Very unfortunately, most of accounts of the Sikh struggles, their feats of bravery and the trials and tribulations, through which they had to pass, have not been recorded in black and white. However, whatever little has been written, lies hidden in the pages of history because

the Sikhs, through carelessness; have utterly failed to highlight them. As a result, most of the Sikhs to-day are unaware of their glorious past. Just mark the case of Bijay Singh. He was born in a very rich family and was enjoying all types of comforts. However, voluntarily, forsaking them all, he was now lying in a pit, besmeared with his own blood all over with three dead bodies under him, and struggling for very life, with no dear soul around to offer him a drink of water or consolation. Were people like Bijay Singh tempted by the prospect of plunder to forsake their homes and fall into these pits? No, they were fighting for a Cause. Unfortunately however, ill-informed people have no appreciation of their lofty motives, because they have never cared to inform themselves of the true nature of this historic struggle. If anybody even now cares to read the harrowing accounts of the death of Banda Bahadur and 740 of his men, his hair would stand on end. Those brave souls were engaged in uprooting nine centuries old rule of injustice and tyranny and not just turning violent under the impact of narcotics. No doubt the Sikhs by then had not stepped out of Hindustan, but, one must remember the conditions that were then prevailing in the Punjab. A ruthless invader like Ahmad Shah was sitting in immediate neighbour-hood at the head of virile Pathans and had Afganistan and Frontier Provinces under his direct control. He had already plundered the Land a number of times. Excepting Lahore, the entire area was under the firm control of heartless rulers all of whom were bitterly opposed to the Sikhs. The Sikhs, on the other hand, had no land, no State, no treasury, no shelter, and no friend. The Muslims and the Hindus were both inimical towards them, so much so that persons like Hindals from their own ranks had also turned against them and were colluding with their enemies. Isn't it

marvellous on the part of the Sikhs that braving such heavy odds they yet succeeded in establishing their sway from Attock to Saharanpur and from Multan and Sind to Kangra, Jammu and Bhimber, besides leading attacks on Delhi, Pataudi, Dujna and even Bikaner. It must be remembered that they proved far more brave than the Marhatahs because as against them, the Sikhs did not have any hill fortresses, no shelter, no established leadership like that of Shivaji and his successors and absolutely no resources whatsoever. As such, the Sikhs are the most outstanding people in the whole world. Surviving against the heaviest odds speaks volumes of the resilience of their character and the authenticity of their faith.

Any student of history can see that but for the Sikhs Ahmed Shah Abdali would have easily succeeded in re-establishing the Pathan rule in India. The Sikhs did not allow him any respite whenever he came to invade Punjab. On his advance towards Delhi, the Sikhs always created such upheavals in the Punjab that he had to return post-haste. Ultimately he got so much scared of fighting and chasing them, that he abandoned all hopes of establishing an alien Pathan rule in India. The supreme bravery of the Sikhs in bigger holocaust (WADA GHALLOOGHARA) had completely demoralized him. For the most daring exploits of the Sikhs let any one scan through the pages of their accounts by some British author. The accounts of the Naushera battle, for example, gives an indication of the brave Sikh Spirit.

Let us return to our narrative after this rather long digression. All though the night Bijay Singh lay there breathing heavily just as, only the upper most leaves of the trees stir with stingy breezes in the humid months of

July and August. At day break people hastened back to their respective villages. As chance would have it, Chuhar Mal's family priest, who was one of the Lahore informers, happened to pass that way, accompanied by some of the soldiers. As he passed by the pit, he heard a very low voice reciting 'Sri Waheguru' at which he hesitatingly paused to see for himself. He was shocked to see Bijay Singh struggling for his life. He had him killed already and had even been paid for it. For a moment he could not believe his eyes to find him alive. At the Begum's demand for informer to find out Bijay Singh he had offered his services for such a purpose and this is how he was now wandering through the land at State expense. He had then thought that Bijay Singh might have escaped from prison and as such, he could never imagine that the search for him was not prompted by hostile intentions. He thought that the Begum was trying to find him out for some severe punishment. That is why he had offered his services as a spy. At finding him alive, he wished to have him killed so that he may be rid off all fears about any possible untoward happening against himself at the hands of Bijay Singh. For such a purpose he told the soldiers that the person they have been looking for was out there and that he should be killed immediately lest he should escape or overpower them. They laughed away the suggestion and did not accept his proposal because, they would be losing the reward by killing him instead of producing him alive, for which they had been commissioned. As such, they descended into the ditch, disentangled Bijay Singh's leg from the horse and straightening his thigh tied it tightly. Offering him some water and first aid, they were able to revive him. Although the priest was in favour of killing him, yet, finding the soldiers adamant, he thought that there was no harm in taking him alive to Lahore where

after all he would be killed for sure and the blame would also lie on the Begum. He hoped to be suitably rewarded, but, he thought to himself that in case of some unexpected adversity he would go underground for sometime, because the conditions in Punjab were by no means stable. This is how Bijay Singh reached Lahore. The Pundit and the soldiers received their reward, while, Bijay Singh was taken to the Palace. The Begum could not see him because her own son was suffering from small-pox and she was busy attending on him. Nevertheless, satisfactory arrangements for the treatments of Bijay Singh were made. By now, Sheel Kaur herself had also a good say in the royal palace.

How very strange that Bijay Singh, who, was on his last breathes, lying all by himself in a deserted pit, should have been able to reach his wife and son. They were immensely pleased to meet him and find him alive. Blessed indeed is the Lord and blessed are His ways! Sheel Kaur threw herself heart and soul in the service of her husband. Although a number of attendants were at her beck and call, yet she preferred to serve all by herself. More than the herbs administered by the doctors, it was the devoted service of Sheel Kaur, his wife, that helped Bijay Singh to recover in a few days. Like the tender tongue abiding in the set of hard teeth, this Sikh family was living in the enemy palace, seemingly in comfort. God had blessed them with a change in fortune. Distressful life in the jungles had now been replaced by royal comforts. Sheel Kaur was now looking gay like the mustard plant, the child was running about like a deer, while Bijay Singh was blooming like a rose. However, this Sikh family refused to grow oblivious of the dire state in which their Sikh brothers lived. They were always planning and dreaming of joining their brethren-in-Faith and serve the Panth.



CHAPTER – XVII

Yet another tragedy befell the Begum now. Her three year old only son, Amin-ud-din, the ruler of Punjab, died a very painful death, of small-pox. He was the very embodiment of all her hopes and as such, her entire future seemed to be in jeopardy. The death of her husband had not deprived her of the power which she was able to retain in the name of her son. With his death it was now all but lost, in these hours of grief, the sagacious advice of Sheel Kaur proved to be of great help to her. At night fall, she went to seek the advice of Bijay Singh as well. She had already been very much impressed by his handsome bearing, because she had never seen the Singhs, energetic and elegant as they are. During her talks with him she was so much bewitched by his sweet voice and ‘Lukman’ like foresight that she developed a great regard for him. Bijay Singh advised her to have herself confirmed as the ruler once again, by winning the confidence of the courtiers. ‘This would not be difficult’, he said, ‘because both the parties are pleased with your administration.’ He further advised her to seek a peaceful settlement with the Sikhs. The very next morning, she called the court and winning the goodwill of its members assumed the reins of power. Trusted emissaries were sent by her to Delhi and to Kabul, as a result of which both the Masters confirmed her as the Queen of Punjab. Within a very short time, she was able to establish herself firmly and, in the land of the brave, the writ of a woman prevailed. However, her advisers did not favour peace with the Sikhs who continued to be persecuted by the roving units of the army under the command of Momin Khan. The

Sikhs decided to kill Momin Khan in order to end his menace. For this purpose, Agher Singh, the nephew of Bhai Mani Singh, went to Lahore 'incognito', and, one day, finding Momin Khan sitting on the bank of the river, challenged him thus,

"O Khan, why do you kill innocent persons. Let us fight a duel to see how brave you really are." In great panic Momin Khan seized his sword and shield. Although he put up a good fight, yet, after a closely waged battle, Agher Singh ultimately succeeded in severing his head. Riding his very horse, he galloped out of the Turk ranks and presented Momin Khan's head at the Khalsa congregation. No body in the Punjab government now had the heart to pursue the Sikhs as determinedly as Momin Khan. On the other hand, some of the Begum's courtiers themselves instigated the Sikhs to create disturbances so that they be in greater demand. Then resented her increasing arrogance after the assumption of power. With unlimited power and millions of rupees at her disposal, daintiest of dishes to relish, varied sources of pleasure to enjoy and with grand gardens like Shalimar to stroll around, a number of beautiful young men to flirt with as well as lackeys (ill-informed advisers) to misguide her, it was but natural for her to become heady and insolent. The Begum, now, was very vainglorious and headstrong. Her word was law. She committed the blunder of raising the status of Bhikhari Khan for whose handsome self she had developed a strong weakness. She had restrained herself for sometime at the advice of Sheel Kaur, but the fire in her had kept smouldering all the time. Power and pelf fanned the fire of her lust to such an

extent that, one day, she had the Wazir summoned to her palace and, like PURAN's mother, made amorous advances towards him. As a faithful employee of her late husband, Bhikhari Khan pleaded with her against her moves but to no avail. The Begum beseeched, implored, begged with folded hands, made many tempting offers and finally even threatened him, but, Bhikhari Khan remained untempted. The Begum felt insulted and through her maid servants gave him such a shoe beating that his skull cracked and he met with a very miserable end. Although the crime was committed within the four walls of the palace, yet the news travelled to the members of the court and they, as a protest, refused to attend her court. They began establishing contacts with the Sikhs and also decided to report to Begum at the royal court of Delhi.

Apart from losing favour with the public, the Begum's relation with Sheel Kaur also got strained now, because, forsaking the comforts of the Suman Palace, Bijay Singh was anxious to join his brethren in faith. For the Begum, this was like releasing a beautiful form framed in glass. The more the Sikh family wanted to leave, greater were the favours showered on it. At the smallest of signs, everything was placed at their disposal including any amount of money. The Begum even tried to anticipate their needs from Bijay Singh's face and would provide for them without asking. The Begum was so much enamoured of his company that she wanted to be with him all the time. At times she would sit with him till late night discussing affairs of the State. The innocent Bijay Singh was, however, as much sick of living in the fort as a nightingale is of being in a cage, be it studded with diamonds. When all other efforts had failed, one day,

Bijay Singh left the palace with his family, in the early hours of the morning. However, at the main gate, they were stopped by the guards who refused to let them out and at once informed the Begum. She personally came over there and pleaded with them to continue to stay there. Bijay Singh was now in a strange predicament. He could neither stay there nor was being allowed to leave. Ultimately, accepting it to be the Will of God, he decided to stay there for some days more, in the hope of finding a more effective way out.

Bijay Singh was all the time under the impression that he was being detained to help sort out for political tangles. However Sheel Kaur, who had been watching very closely, had serious misgivings that her husband might have to face the same fate as that of Bhikhari Khan. She was very much worried on this account because she could neither discuss it with the Begum nor find a way out to leave the palace. At last, feeling helpless, she discussed the matter with her husband.

On hearing this, the Singh frowned but kept silent, all the time biting his lips in anger. Nodding his head gently, he said, 'I also had some such misgivings, although, I have been reluctant to entertain such evil thoughts in my mind, because, I did not think it proper to accuse anybody without some solid evidence. However, I have been ever anxious to leave this place and join my brethren-in-Faith, to serve the cause of my Nation. From your words I am now convinced about and real intentions of the Begum, because your observation had been very profound. But, what should I do? I have been thinking a lot about it, and yet can't find a way. There is, perhaps only one route that is to jump over the wall of the fort from the North-West. Who knows by God's grace we may succeed in

getting out of this place?' Sheel Kaur approved of the plan but advised him to work the details in this respect. Bijay Singh said, 'I do have a plan which, I hope, may bear fruit. I will, first of al, suspend you down, in turn, with the help of a rope or a length of cloth. Down there, at a little distance away, there is a Pipal tree, scaling which you would firmly tie the end of the rope with the highest of its branches so that holding the other end of the rope, I may be able to suspend myself down.'

The husband and wife agreed upon this plan. With the fall of night, Bijay Singh waited for the opportune moment which was not easy to come by. Next night too, he could not avoid the guards. On the third day, they decided to make a bid early in the first half of the night, because the guards took their positions a little later. Tying the end of the cloth around her waist, Sheel Kaur climbed up the wall, first, and Bijay Singh, holding the other end, stood in readiness for his turn. As Sheel Kaur was trying to climb down the other side someone caught hold of her arm and said, 'My dear sister, is it proper on your part to leave me like this and go away?' All the three of them were taken aback and their plan was frustrated. Feeling rather small they came back to their place.

Begum: Why are you silent? Please do speak out your mind. I am not offended by you. I am aware that you were very keen to go away from me, but I, on my part, have ever looked upto you for support. Truly has it been said that friend fell off in adversity.

Sheel Kaur: You may be right, but, It is not we who are trying to avoid you: on the other hand it is rather you who are forcing us to find clandestine means to depart.

Begum: How, after all?

Sheel Kaur: My husband would let you know about it.

Begum: Why Sir? (With a deep sigh) Have you ever heard anybody forsaking one's own life?

Bijay Singh: It may be true, and yet, there are many who do consume opium, a poison.

Begum: Persons in their senses do not do so; frustrated alone do likewise.

Bijay Singh: Although you pretend to seek our advice, yet, you have never cared to follow it. For example, we have ever wished you to keep good company, do good deeds, keep good relations with the ministers and the omerahs, but, you have always ignored it. The results are bound to be bad because of this attitude, on your part and so all the advice you seek from us is meaningless.

Begum: O No! Henceforth, I promise to do as you say. I do hope now you have no more reasons to go.

Bijay Singh: There are other reasons as well. We do not wish to live here like prisoners. We are very keen to join our DAL (group), although we promise to keep on meeting you and offering you any piece of advice that you may stand in the need of, on the condition that you mend your relations with the Sikhs.

Begum: When I cannot even afford to keep you away from my eyes, how can I allow you to join your DAL (Group)? Ascetics are not known to ever stick to a place. I very much wish you to abdicate the thought of returning to the fold of the Sikhs for living with them. You must live with me for ever. That would enable you to rise to the highest of position and your writ would then prevail everywhere because I would not issue any orders. However, it is possible only if you accept Islam, because I am at the mercy of Durrani and Delhi both.

Bijay Singh: How very funny on your part to ask us accept Islam, when you yourself have never offered NIMAZ (Muslim Prayer) or kept fasts. If that is an indication of your mind, then we will have to stake our very lives to get out of this place.

Begum: I am really sorry. It was only a casual remark at which you need not take offence. In future I promise not to say anything which may not be to your liking.

Bijay Singh: Very well.

Begum: But, you also should make a promise to the effect that you will not go away from this place.

Bijay Singh: I give you my word that as long as you stick to your promise, I will do the same. However, as and when you break your promise, then, I shall deem myself freed from my pledge.

Begum: Alright. You need have no misgivings. I shall see to it that every comfort is made available to you. At the slightest harm to you, my very heart tends to break down. I have no-body to fall back upon except you. I was very unhappy at your bid to escape, but, I am now reassured.

Now she greeted Sheel Kaur very warmly, hugged her son to her bosom and placing her hand on Bijay Singh's shoulder rose to go away for her dinner.

Sheel Kaur and Bijay Singh were very much perplexed at their strange situation. However, soon enough they composed themselves and laughed away the seriousness hoping for the best. Sheel Kaur did remark to her husband that his promise might entangle them still further.

Bijay Singh: We are already very much entangled, and there seems to be now way out. The Begum is now

sure to reinforce the guard on us. As far as my promise is concerned, I intend to abide by it, but, she is not likely to honour her solemn word, because she has lost all sense of propriety under the influence of power. We should now be prepared for the worst, because people sometimes have to suffer grievously for a good cause. Those alone are sublime beings who withstand troubles of this sort with courage and conviction.



CHAPTER – XVIII

One day, at about four in the morning in the backyard garden of the palace, Bijay Singh was engaged in prayers and meditations. The beams of the late night Moon, looking like a grey beard on the face of the Earth, lent this time a chaste grace, and the star-studded night added further to its calm beauty. The soothing cool of the atmosphere was as refreshing and pure as dew drops on rose petals.

For the Begum, however, it had been a very sleepless night. Like a fish out of water, she had been feeling very restless. Sometimes she would go upstairs and then come down, again she would sit on the balcony and then retire to the room. Just as a man engrossed in meditation is unaware of the refreshing atmosphere around, similarly, the beauty of the night could not cheer up the Begum. Suddenly she would start weeping, then would begin to laugh. At times she would be in her spirits and then all of a sudden, would be as helpless as ever. For quite sometime she was lost in a soliloquy like this:

“O my heart, you must behave now. It is because of you that I had to face a lot of embarrassment on account of Bhikhari Khan’s episode. A woman is after all a woman, may she be the mistress of hundreds of dominions yet the slightest suspicion about her conduct, loosens her hold on the people. Don’t you know the fate of poor Razia Begum? Just see, what a mean pleasure I am hankering after? Although I am the mistress of the whole of the Punjab yet, my own heart is not in my control. Alas! my evil deeds are

bound to be recorded in the pages of the history and even after thousands of years when even my bones shall have become dust in my grave, the evil attributed to me on account of Bhikhari Khan's affair shall not be forgotten. Whenever and wherever there will be a mention of my name, his name shall also be referred to. Now a helpless Sikh is caught in my net. He is a prisoner, absolutely innocent and totally at my mercy. He does not have much name to lose. The world has double standards and a man is not taken so much to task as a woman is, if he displays lust or becomes adulterous. That is why women are advised to be very discreet and upright about their honour and chastity. A woman must exercise greater self-control as far as any emotional display is concerned. But this is easier said than done. Besides, who knows what future holds for us? If I have to meet my end soon, what do I care about the kingdom. I feel so very lonely..... Let me go to Bijay Singh and have a word with him. He is too innocent to be aware of such feelings. How very virtuous, wise and devoted he really is. He is a real beauty. How can I bear to be deprived of the joy of union with him."

Tossed between these such thoughts the Begum was trying to pass the interminable night. At last unable to control her passions, she went to Sheel Kaur's quarters where through a slit in the door, she saw her sitting with her son. Finding Bijay Singh not there, she came back to sit on the balcony. Looking down into the garden she saw someone with a handsome face sitting on the marble slab. She reached there to find Bijay Singh engrossed in prayers. She calmed down, her evil thoughts vanished and she bowed before him. Bijay Singh opened his eyes and said, 'Please do not bow your head and be seated.'

Begum:

You must be very much surprised to find me here at this hour. Just as your love for God has not allowed you to sleep, similarly, my love for you has not allowed me to take any rest. You must listen to my supplication. I am deeply in love with you; I have tried my best to eradicate this thought from my mind but to no avail. Therefore, I earnestly beseech you to take me in marriage. If you accept Islam, well and good, otherwise let us solemnize our marriage in secret.

Bijay Singh: O Mother of thy subjects, let good sense be your guide. You know very well that I am already married and you too owe it to your subjects to safeguard their life by properly administering the vast domains of which you are the ruler.

Begum: I have committed no sin by suggesting a marriage which is a sacred relationship.

Bijay Singh: There is no doubt that marriage is a very sacred relationship which two unmarried persons solemnly enter into in order to share each other's woes and weals during their sojour in this world. As far as I am concerned I am already married. Apart from this, you must also take into consideration the fact that by marrying me you will not be able to save your kingdom. Also I shall never accept Islam come what may. What is the use of chasing this will-O'-the-wisp? If you care to accept my advice, you must try to imbibe the teachings of Quran or I can relate to you the sayings of the Holy Gurus. This will help you regain your equilibrium;

Begum: I am not much worried about my royal state. You must try to understand my feelings which have their origin in the very depths of my heart. Have you ever known

a woman begging for marriage? This is an indication of my deep love for you. And there is no reason for me to feel ashamed of this pious feeling.

Bijay Singh: You have solemnly adopted Sheel Kaur as your sister. Are you true to your faith? May God help you, O Queen, to take care of your kingdom.

Begum: I have thought over everything. No harm can come to my rule, because I know how to keep the country under my thumb. You should not refuse my request on such pretexts.

Bijay Singh: I cannot enter into such a relationship because I am a Singh.

Begum: I offer myself to be your wife, your own. I am not seeking any extra-marital relations. Why do you think otherwise? I am seeking marriage with you which is sacred. I just want it to be kept a secret.

Bijay Singh: I have a wife already, whom I have solemnly wed.

Begum: We the Muslims are allowed to have even four consorts.

Bijay Singh: I do not think it is good to have more than one. If you really love me and love me honestly, then adopt me as your son and love me as such. I promise to serve you as a son then. Love can be fulfilled even in this form.

Begum: I won't like to be put off by such excuses. I have thought over everything inside out and I cannot take any of this agony any more.

Saying this, the Begum's eyes turned red and she began to tremble all over. Taking hold of Bijay Singh's hand she pressed it hard and tried to say something, but the words got stuck in her throat. Bijay Singh tried to

disengage his hand but could not do so. For a while he kept sitting with his eyes closed. Then, with a strong jerk, he pulled back his hand and left the place. Meanwhile the sun had also risen, and its rays falling on the face of the Queen, grown pale at the cooling down of her emotions, gave it a horrid expression. Her maid servants, who had been looking for her, not finding her in her apartment, soon arrived there and took her back into the palace. Laying her down on the bed, they revived her spirits by sprinkling rose water on her. Thereafter, she was given a message with sandal oil and then a cold bath. Just as after a storm and rain, a strong waft of wind continues to blow intermittantly, similarly, the Begum also continued to heave sighs at some intervals. She did not even attend the court, where she used to address the courtiers sitting behind a veil. The inmates of the palace had been informed that the Begum was suffering from headache, at which a number of Hakims (doctors) were summoned, who however, could not diagnose her trouble. As the day advanced, the Begum was able to sleep and thus the lustful passions being roasted in her inflamed heart like the grains in a sand cauldron calmed down somewhat. When she awoke in the evening she was feeling as weak as if she had recovered from a long ailment.



CHAPTER – XIX

The Begum, now, was in a very miserable state. She could neither sleep well nor laugh nor eat. Stung by her pride, she, at times, was inclined to award retributive punishment as she had done to Bhikhari Khan, but, because of feeling of love for Bijay Singh and the fear of notoriety, she desisted from doing so in his case. The murder of Bhikhari Khan had already brought her a very bad name. As such, she was trying to weave a different scheme, to achieve her aim. Following this plan, she had Sheel Kaur imprisoned in a separate cell alongwith her son.

This cell was under a round-the-clock vigil. Early one morning, a maid servant entered Sheel Kaur's room, holding two beautiful bowls in her hands. Placing them before Sheel Kaur, she said, 'I have brought these for both of you to drink.'

Sheel Kaur: What do they contain?

Maid servant: Although I am under orders not to reveal, yet, I am so much obliged to you that I am in a moral dilemma. If I tell you, I am sure to be indicted, but, if I don't, I will be guilty of ingratitude. However, I must tell you, because this is something which cannot be concealed for long. Dear Madam, this is poison which has been sent by your husband.

Sheel Kaur: This can never be. Had it been sent by my husband, I would have counted it as a blessing. But my dear husband can never do so, because he is a true Sikh and true Sikhs are always true to their wives. My husband and myself are joined in a spiritual wedlock.

Maid: (Startled) Good Lady, how well do you know your husband. Now I will not be able to keep back anything from you. Your husband has so far refused to oblige the Begum, inspite of the fact that the temptation of all the comforts of the world has been held out to him. Eversince he has been separated from you, he is ever being attended upon by a number of beautiful maids who are trying to bring him round. However, he continues to be adamant and dismisses them as casually as an elephant dispenses flies. Yesterday, I overheard him telling the Begum that as she had gone back on her promise, he would leave the place. The Begum, however, was trying to convince him that his wife had been taken away by his father, Chuhar Mal. But he refused to believe.

Sheel Kaur: Let God's will prevail! I am already a sacrifice unto my husband. May he never come to any harm; may SATGURU protect him ever.

Maid: Blessed are you, blessed is your religion and blessed is your fidelity towards your husband. Why can't this fool, our Begum understand the stuff you are made of?

Son: What, if we refuse to drink?

Maid: You will be then put to death; the Begum has already decided so.

Sheel Kaur: Alright then. (Addressing her son), 'Dear son; die we must one day. It is impossible to get out of this fort alive, alongwith your father. However, it is not difficult for your father to get out of here all by himself. He can easily scale the wall of the fort as we tried that day. But, he is feeling handicapped because of us. Myself being a woman and you being as yet just a child find it difficult to match him in physical effort to do so. Your father now is under very strong pressure to renounce his

religion which, however, he will never do. Left to himself, he will be able to save not only his Faith but also his life. I am very much worried that he may not lose his life on our account. That is why I think that it is better for me to die so that he is able to save himself. As for you, I would have very much wished you to stay alive, but, my dear, in view of the prevailing circumstances it would be better for you to accompany me. After my death they will never allow you to meet your father and will subject you to various types of temptations and threats to which, God forbid, if you happen to fall, then the whole Nation of the Khalsa shall have cause to curse me for giving birth to such an accursed child. Although I am fully convinced that with pure Khalsa blood running in your veins, you will be able to withstand all pressure, yet your tender age sometimes gives me reason to feel worried. Therefore, my very dear son, let us go to the holy feet of the Lord. We have had enough of the world; it is like an onion's skin which is not worth anything.

Mother's advice had a very telling effect on the mind of the child. Sitting close by, the maid kept staring at them, and the mother and the son drank the bowls of poison at a drought. Touching the feet of the maid, Sheel Kaur begged of her to inform her husband about their death so that he might save his life by escaping from this place. The bewildered maid touched their feet and then left the place. The mother and her son engaged themselves in prayers.

Soon thereafter, the Begum reached there. Offering her a straw mat, Sheel Kaur said to her, 'Sister, I have nothing else to offer, please be seated.'

Begum: Sheel Kaur you are really great. When I heard that your husband had given poison to you, I was stunned and that is why I have come here post-haste to

find out the cause of this faithlessness. As a matter of fact it is just now that I learnt about your imprisonment. All the time Bijay Singh had been trying to mislead me by saying that you had gone to the town. Being a simpleton I could never imagine the real cause. It is only to-day that I have come to know that he has fallen for a maid servant and for her sake he has tried to kill you. But, you need have no fears, I have sent for the doctor (Hakim), who is sure to cure you by administering an antidote. Pretending to weep, she said, 'Dear sister please do not have any worry. I shall not allow any harm to come to you.'

Sheel Kaur: Dear sister, there is no need for any doctor now. I very well know that I have not been poisoned by my husband. This must be the result of some evil doings on my part. It is the Will of God which I must gladly accept. I adopted you as a sister and I have ever tried to uphold this pledge. I seek to be excused for any fault on my part.

Begum: Dear sister, you have left me alone. (With false tears) You have been my only support, I don't know what shall I do after you are gone. You have been my mother, my sister, my only support and my companion through thick and thin. (Pleading with joined hands), 'Let me try to make a bid for your treatment.'

Sheel Kaur: Dear sister, go and relax. I am in great distress and my life may end any moment. You may find it difficult to see it. As such, you must go away. I assure you that I have no complaint against you. Even if you were at fault, I would readily excuse you. Please go now. Take pity on my husband and set him free. This is my last request to you.

Just at this moment, a tutored maid-servant came running and seemingly in great panic said, 'Your Majesty, something terrible has happened.' Hearing this the Begum:

left, pretending to be very much disturbed. Almost immediately thereafter, Sheel Kaur and her son started vomiting so heavily that they seemed to be pouring out their very soul. In the process most of the poisonous matter got drained out of their bodies. However, weakness and loss of consciousness reduced both of them to the point of death. Throughout the day they lay in that very condition and at nightfall the Begum ordered that the bodies should be thrown into the river. However, when the persons who had gone out to throw away the bodies, heard some voices at a distance, they thought that a party of the Sikhs was advancing towards them. They threw the bodies at a deserted place outside the fort and ran away. According to the Begum they had already died and the persons who had gone to throw them away had also thought likewise. Thus, those who used to sleep on velvet and cosy beds were now lying on the hard bare craggy earth, away from their kith and kin, like some dead wild animals. The stars in the sky shed their tender light on these sacred souls in the hope that this might revive life in them. The gentle breeze grazed against their bodies like the bow of a SARANGI in the hope that under its impact the strings of life in them may give forth a melody of life. Although Nature herself was sympathizing with these saintly souls, yet no human being was willing to be compassionate towards them—their fault being their deep love for religion who had fallen a victim at the altar of faith.

Inside the fort another play was being enacted at the behest of the fate. In a decorated room, Bijay Singh sat on a bed woven with peacock feathers, surrounded by beautiful maids. He looked like a gem among pebbles. These maids were Begum's closest companions and they

were trying to persuade Bijay Singh accede to the requests of the Begum. However, their persuasions have as much effect on Bijay Singh, as water on the oiled body of a horse. Completely frustrated in their attempt, the maids left him at about midnight. Immediately thereafter, the Begum herself came over there and began to plead with Bijay Singh like this:

“Singhji, please be a little more considerate. If you accept Islam, I shall make you the ruler of the whole of Punjab, because it is very easy for me to do so. You should take pity on yourself, lest your beauty should wither away like that of a wild flower. God has blessed you with unsurpassed beauty. I think that right from the beginning of creation, God has been putting aside a part of beauty from each of His lovely creatures and assembling those parts. He has now created a person Bijay Singh by name, whom He has sent into this world. O stone-hearted prince, why are you bent upon destroying that beauty? And why don’t you speak?”

Bijay Singh: O Queen mother, Like a deer you are following a mirage to satiate your thirst; as such, you are bound to die in sandy deserts. What you seek comfort from is the source of all woes and worries. You may find it difficult to dissuade your heart, but, in that alone lies your welfare. If, on the other hand, you allow yourself to follow the dictates of your heart, you are bound to come to grief.

“Pain may befall him, who ever seeks the peace
Let me not therefore seek such a Peace”

If we sow seeds of poppy, they sprout into beautiful plants with beautiful flowers. But alas! all these end up into

countless seeds of poison which ultimately permeates into all of its parts—roots, leaves, branches and flowers. Besides, it does not happen only once; everytime the process is repeated it, splits poison multifold and so becomes a perennial source of poisonous stream.

Evil thoughts may appear to be very charming but to try to put them into practice is like consuming the poison of a snake. The moth is taken in by the beauty of the lamp; as long as it keeps itself at a distance, it is safe, but, if it draws near, under the influence of lust, it gets burnt, falls down and dies in anguish. Beware, O Queen, the lust has consumed many saints and savants, sages and prophets, Kings lost their kingdoms, ascetics their honour and the spirituals their souls tempted by lust. As a queen, you should stand firmly on your feet and learn a lesson from Bhikhair Khan's episode.

Begum: O you stone-hearted fellow, don't try to sermonize like a Sheikh. Such opportunities do not come again and again; if we allow them to go unavailed for fear of religion, we will have to repent.

Bijay Singh: O Queen mother, time moves on, whether we spend it in vice or in virtue. But it leaves behind, the trail of the pleasure of virtuous deeds or the misery of the evil acts. The chariot of Time has two wheels, of Vice and Virtue, which leave behind two tracks of repentance and reward. Although I am not well versed in Muslim code, but whatever I know of the Hindu traditions, their widows pass the rest of their lives in chastity and hence are respected like grandmothers. However, those of them who fall for lust and following their hearts' desires, throw all discretion to winds are derided and discarded. They repent bitterly when the evil person, whom they had mistakenly taken for their sympathizer, fails to stand by

them. What else can one expect when one fails to heed the advice of the elders and mistakes akk (a poisonous plant) for a mango.

Begum: (somewhat irritated) Singh ji, it is all too easy to sermonize. There is nothing bad in my suggestion. Does your religion forbids marriage and widow's remarriage?

Bijay Singh: They are allowed in Sikhism, provided they conform to our religious code. As for me, I am already married.

Begum: But your wife is already dead. (With pretended tears) Dear Sheel has passed away.

Bijay Singh: It is impossible.

Begum: Believe me, it is a fact. Your father, Chuhar Mal, took her away against my advice, some days ago. I had to agree only when he told me that her mother-in-law was weeping all the time to see her. However, I have now been informed that your wife and son have been crushed by the roof that fell over their heads and that they have already been cremated by your brother. I am reliably informed that in fact your brother killed them deliberately with a view to eliminate the co-inheritors of the ancestral property.

Bijay Singh: I refuse to believe it.

Begum: I affirm most solemnly that is a fact. I have already ordered the arrest of your brother.

At the thought of the loss of his dearest souls, Bijay Singh was in great anguish and shut his eyes. However, when he saw the vision of the holy Guru, he was convinced of the immorality of the soul. With a firm faith in the inexorable law of *Karma*, and the benevolence of God, he calmed down with inner solace. After about ten minutes

when he opened his eyes, two drops of tears fell from them and thrice from his mouth he uttered the word, 'Blessed, blessed, blessed.' Although Bijay Singh did not believe in the queen's version, yet he had some misgivings that she herself might have had them killed in order to remove his objections to remarriage. However, he took it as the Will of God.

Begum: What do you say now?

Bijay Singh: What should I say? I was not born to marry a rich woman and live in comfort. My life is dedicated to the cause of righteousness and the service of the people. For me, beautiful beds are like seats of thorns, while to sleep on thorns alongwith my brethren-in-faith is like lying on a bed made of velvet. With them I would be glad to live on the leaves of the jungle. In them lies virtue, while in these cosy beds lies evil. Soul is immortal while body is perishable. Why should I lament the loss of a perishable thing? I would rather look forward to the immortal bliss of spiritual salvation, being eternal. Besides, a persons who is born for a Mission must dedicate himself to it, otherwise, he is ridiculed like this',

"Beware, thou, O Man,
In thy life-span,
Must thou earn the bliss,
Of love Divine and kiss,
But, in evil art thou lost, And headlong go thou fast,
To thy sad plight,
And life is past mid-night."

Begum: Never in my life have I bowed before anybody and no body has ever dared to defy my orders. It is only to you that I now bow. You must appreciate my humility and accept my proposal. We will keep our marriage a secret for sometime, till I have a proclamation issued from Kabul. No body would dare cast an evil eye on you.

Thus you can be the king for a mere asking and even fulfil your commitment with the Sikhs. Joining the Sikhs now would spell your ruination because their rule, for the present, is a far cry. A ruthless and determined ruler may even exterminate them root and branch. You are, therefore, advised to avail yourself of this rare opportunity to sit on the throne without having to shed even a drop of blood.

Bijay Singh: O Queen mother, I am grateful to you for your offer of a kingdom but, I belong to a Nation which has full faith in the strength of its arms. The Sikhs would never agree to acquire rule in such a dubious way. Power we shall gain, but, only by the sharp edge of our own sword. Moreover, Abdali is not as great a fool as you think him to be. The moment you marry me, a Sikh, you will be condemned as an infidel and then dethroned. Abdali may take sometime in coming, but your own Omerahs would rise to finish you, because no Muslim will stand your marriage to a non-muslim. However, if I accept Islam, then, but that is absolutely out of question. I can relinquish the royal title over fourteen Universes for the sake of Sikhism. And, I am convinced that by your accepting Sikhism, a Sikh rule cannot be established either. Moreover, the rulers of Delhi, howsoever weakened, are still in a position to deal with the Punjab. Ghazi-ud-din has his eye on your daughter. He will insist on marriage alliance with her to keep you under his thumb. Therefore, it is not wise to entertain such wild dreams as you seem prone to.

Begum: Has a hungry man ever refused an offer of food? Why don't you ask the Sikhs?

Bijay Singh: The brave and honourable Sikhs always condemn servility and crookedness. They will do all that is right and proper after they assume power. But for the

present, they are devoted to the cause of their religion with courage and conviction. As you know, they had scornfully declined the offer of feudatory Lordship (Nawabi). On insistence, however, they had pointed towards a Sikh engaged in fanning his co-religionists, saying "let it be given to him". Don't you know that on the arrival of Abdali, the Sikhs have many a time forsaken their hold over certain areas temporarily, like the snake shedding its skin, but, they have never greeted him with rich offerings to hold on to these areas as his vassals, because, for them it will be a stigma on their dignity and bravery. However, they have never allowed any respite to Abdali. On his advance towards Delhi, they create such havoc in Punjab that he is obliged to beat a retreat, during which they again retire beyond his reach. On his return march towards Kabul, he is constantly harrassed by them. At Kabul he is all the more disturbed to learn about their achievements in Punjab. The Sikhs have not allowed Abdali to re-establish Afghan rule in India. These highly enlightened and proud people, therefore, would never agree to your suggestion. As such, I am obliged to refuse all your offers. I am a free bird, and instead of feeding on rich stones in a golden cage, I would prefer to live on pebbles in free air. This is final.

One marvels at the way Bijay Singh stuck to his values and his love for freedom. Even in the face of the most tempting offers, he remained firm in his resolve and pious in his thoughts. Never did he waiver nor ever compromise his noble thinking. In sharp contrast, the people, today, forsake their religion and moral values for a beautiful face, or a fair complexioned girl, to the great misery of their own wives. Like hungry kids, they hanker after fair skinned women. The more affluent Sardars are

after fair skinned women. The more affluent Sardars are squandering their riches in evil deeds at houses of ill-repute and are gradually being reduced from Sardars to Serfs. That is why the number of comparatively richer Sardars is declining every day. With the passing away of the older generation, the younger is falling a prey to the mundane values. Most of families are leading a miserable existence, because of lack of love between the husband and the wife. They are always clashing with each other like the river stones. The off-springs of quarrelsome couples never respect their parents. God created homes to be heavens, but the way-wards have turned them into so many hells. Just as a chaste wife is the light of the family, similarly, a faithful husband is its lamp. If both of them are honest in their mutual obligations, they add not only to their own happiness, but also to that of the entire family. As such, they can exercise a very healthy influence on their children. Rational thinking alone differentiates a man from an animal. 'Abdicating righteous thoughts is to abdicate humanity.

Khalsa Ji, always try to draw inspiration from the upright lives of your elders and follow them in their honest ways. A moral and ethical life alone ensures your happiness, in this world as well as in the next. You should always keep in mind the holy words of the holy Guru in which He exalts marital fidelity thus:

As is the companionship of a
venomous serpent, so is the
ravishing of another's wife.



CHAPTER – XX

The moonless night, like a widow, barren and beaten, had spread over itself a blue sheet of modesty. The darkness of unfulfilled desires was pervading all around. Just as with the fall of a plate full of fried rice from the hand of a child, rice grains get scattered, similarly the stars were scattered all over the sky. The birds and the animals were sitting silently, as if in awe. The trees with down-cast branches appeared to be standing in great distress. Night's friend, Nature, was so much overwhelmed by her mate's plight that she had completely identified herself with her.

With the storm building the sky became cloudy. The anguished cries of the blowing storm were soon accompanied by the tears like drizzle of the clouds. The thunder of the clouds sounded like the beating of breast and the whole world seemed to be trembling under its impact. The broken branches of the trees were flying all around. 'O ye tormented night, your very heart seems to have burst open baring the wounds of thy heart, in a manner which has put even the moonlight to shame.' Yes, with the thunder of lightning, the very heart of the night seemed to have been ripped apart. But, 'O ye dark night, the mother of evil, all the foul acts are committed under your cover. Why do you torment the poor people? Now, you must bear the trouble all by yourself. You are now beating your breast in great anguish, but have you ever sympathized with those innocent people who are robbed by thieves aided and abetted by you. You are the main support of the dacoits. To the murderer also you lend your help; as he lifts his sword with his right hand, you stand by him alike

his left hand. Many an innocent woman molested at the hands of the evil seekers under the cover of your darkness which has widowed and orphaned many. Have you realized today how painful it is to be thus tormented? You are dark like the black shawl of a tyrant. Good company even seems to have had no effect on you. Your husband, the Moon, has tried to help you for quite a length of time, shedding its light all around, but, still you remain as dark as ever. Afraid of your husband, you grow white in his presence, but hiding in caves, corners, trees and other obscure places, you are always biding for an opportunity to come out immediately after his departure. Had you been good, you would have shed your darkness in the company of the Moon. But, you are as dark as ever. Perhaps it is because of your evil company that the Moon has developed some dark spots on its face’.

To-night, Bijla Singh had been strolling near the Lahore fort after which he headed towards the jungle. Enroute, his feet fell upon a very delicate thing and he got startled. With a flash in the clouds, he saw a Sikh child and a Sikh woman, who, later on were found to belong to a Sikh Family. With great care, Bhai ji, lifted the child, and took him into a mud hut a little distance away. Thereafter, he came with two more men who carried away the Sikh woman as well. At this place, to-day, stands a beautiful Gurdwara, Dehra Sahib by name, in the memory of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji. In those days at this place, there used to be an improvised hut with a boundary wall. As it did not attract much attention then, a blind Sikh used to live there, and he was of great help to the Sikh spies. On entering the room, Bijla Singh saw two Singhs who had come incognito to find out Bijay Singh. Both of them

recognized the woman and the child to be the wife and son of Bijay Singh. Taking off their wet clothes, they were wrapped in dry sheets. They were then warmed up with fire and some medicine was administered to them to revive them.

After a night long vigil, they helped the two extremely weak souls to regain some life. Very soon thereafter, they were well on their way to full recovery. Fortunately, the previous night's rain had helped them a lot, because it diminished the effect of the opium which was one of the ingredients of the poison given to them. The vomiting immediately after the consumption of poison had proved very useful, because it had drained out much of the poison. However, the opium part of it left its baneful effect in the form of intoxication which the rain helped to break. Truly has it been said:

“He, whom God saves, cannot be destroyed.”

On the second and the third day, they remained confined to bed, after which Sheel Kaur was in a position to narrate the tortures through which she and her husband had to pass. Now, all of them decided to join Karora Singh's Jatha (band) for a bid to free Bijay Singh. And so one day they left the place in disguise at about dusk.

The Sikhs at that time were not under as much pressure as they used to be in the days of Mir Mannu. Because of the infights in which the Begum was engaged the Sikhs had become active throughout the land. Most of the courtiers had turned against the Begum and were reporting against her to Delhi to the effect she was ruining the country. Taking advantage of the divided house, the Sikhs were gaining ground.

All the advice that Bijay Singh could offer fell on deaf ears. The more he tried to hold on to his Faith and

moral conduct, the deeper was the Begum lost in her love for him. She was convinced that he was a unique being as he had remained steadfast despite the great onslaughts of love launched against him. Howsoever, well read a person may be, it is very difficult to withstand the advancers of love and temptation. But the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh; who have enshrined the Lord of aigrette (Kalgianwala) in their heart, do not submit to any enemy. This is a great truth that the Sikhs do not even seek any quarter from any enemy. They prefer to die fighting rather than accept the ignominy of defeat. In this struggle too, Bijay Singh did not fall and no effort on the part of the Begum was of any avail. She resorted to witchcraft as well. Secretly one day a faquir sat in meditation before a fire. Still another advised the Begum to sit for four hours before a statue of Bijay Singh, reciting a particular 'Kalma' (words), but all these effort were in vain. After a few days, one night the Begum fell down on her knees and grasping the feet of Bijay Singh wept most copiously. Bijay Singh was somewhat touched and remembers an exhortation from Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

"If thou desirest thy Beloved, then hurt thou not any one's heart." (Farid)

He thought that he had injured her heart a lot and for this he was afraid, he may be held accountable to God. Lest he may be sinning in the name of escaping another sin, he asked the Begum "What, after all, do you seek from me?"

Begum: You know it so well my dear that I want you to marry me.

Bijay Singh: This is impossible.

Begum: (Drawing out a dagger) Well, then I will end my life. It is better to sacrifice myself at the altar of your

love. At this she tried to dig the dagger into her stomach. Bijay Singh, however, moved quickly and snatched the dagger before it could touch the stomach and pleaded with her not to make him accountable before God for this sinful act on her part. He further told her that if she was really that desperate then he would take the agony of joining her in a wedlock. As she left elated, Bijay Singh had a dreadful vision in which he saw, an angry and stout Nihang Singh with his sword drawn and saying, "O you Singh, what is this promise about? Shall I cut you apart in two?" As the Nihang Singh waved his sword, Bijay Singh came back to his senses and looked around, but there was not even a trace either of the Begum or of the Nihang Singh. He got afraid and despite the candle light, saw the circles of darkness advance and then recede in turn. In great panic he looked around, but could not make out anything. His forehead was very hot and so was his entire body. He came onto the balcony. The cool air refreshed him and helped him compose himself. Bijay Singh was immensely relieved to realize that it was just a walking dream. Bijay Singh was extremely annoyed with himself, at having agreed to marry another woman even in a dream. He felt that his heart, which had ever stood by him, had now turned against him, though in a dream only. "When my bosom friend has turned against me, who can I now turn to for support? Everybody around me has been conspiring to force me to forego my morality and chastity and my heart, alone has stood by me like a true friend. Although, it is only in a dream that it has betrayed me, yet, after all, it has forsaken me. I am afraid that it may betray me even when I am fully awake. Sri Guru Granth Sahib enjoins that even in dream one ought to meditate on the Name of God; yea, even in dream one must be vigilant." Bijay Singh

firmly resolved to keep a tight rein on his heart. His eyes, which had never shed tears, were, for the first time, moistened.

Khalsa ji, just mark the high moral character of your elders, who loathed to talk to another woman even in a dream. This was the real secret of Sikh strength. It is because we have drifted away from this high ideal that we are now coming to grief in all walks of life.

Chastity and high moral character, beside ensuring a sound and healthy body, give birth to healthy children, with pristine pure souls. Whosoever cares to imbibe such qualities is ever prosperous, while others always come to a sad end. Bhartheri has every aptly said, "it is not the man who enjoys sex, it is the sex which enjoys man." The very fact that is the body that grow old and weak but not the lust, proves that the lust ultimately consumes the body. High moral character and meditation on the holy Name alone assure a strong and healthy body with a clean soul in it.

As against to-day, about a century ago, the people in general used to be very happy. It is because the people then were God-fearing and possessed high moral character. The Sikhs, even to-day, may be brave, but they certainly lack the valour, the virtues, and the virile spirit of person like Baba Deep Singh and Baba Gurbax Singh who demonstrated human qualities of courage and conviction to perfection.



CHAPTER – XXI

As stated in the previous chapter, the affairs of the state were, then, in a very bad shape. The state officers were in a fix. If they tried to follow the Begum's orders, then, for days together they had to wait for her instructions and if they acted on their own, then she got so enraged that she did not hesitate to insult even the highest of them. Once when one of these officers dared to advise her against such an attitude on her part, he was rebuked and rebuffed. The episode of Bhikhari Khan was still fresh in their minds. Therefore, they sent a joint petition to Delhi against the Begum with whom, meanwhile, they refused to cooperate. For the Sikhs, this was a happy chance which they tried to exploit. They became active once again and tried to assert themselves. For the band (Jatha) of Karora Singh this was a rare opportunity to free Bijay Singh. One day, when his followers were assembled in congregation, Karora Singh presented before them Sheel Kaur and her son and narrated to them the trials and tribulations through which they had to pass for the sake of their 'religion'. He also related to them the story of Bijay Singh and the way he was upholding his 'Dharma' in the face of the highest of temptations. The Khalsa was all praise for him and resolved to free him immediately, come what may. Karora Singh himself was of the opinion that despite the weak state of the government, it was not so very easy for them to reach Lahore openly, because in that event, all the factions of the government were bound to join hands against them. Besides, there was not much time at their disposal to bring together the whole 'Panth' for the purpose, because

Delhi and Kabul, the two claimants for authority in this area, having already been informed of the situation, were sure to exert. Therefore, he advised them to plan in such a way that they may be able to achieve their aim at the earliest and with minimum of loss.

When everybody was thinking about it, Bijay Singh's little son got up and greeting the assembly with folded hands said, "Respected sir, would not it be better for the Sikhs to divide themselves into small groups and reach, incognito, a marshy spot on the Ravi bank, near Lahore, from different directions. On night fall, they may make a sudden attack on the fort to free my dear father."

On hearing this, Karora Singh was so pleased that he smilingly hugged the child to his bosom and said, "Blessed is the mother who has given you birth and blessed indeed is your father." Mastan Singh and Dharam Singh, sitting respectively on his right and left, endorsed this suggestion and then the entire assembly of the Sikhs wholeheartedly approved of it.

Now, the Sikhs disguised themselves as Pathans, Mughals, Rajputs, Landlords etc. and left for Lahore in small groups which assembled near the marshy areas of river Ravi. Through their agents, sent for the purpose, they learnt that the entire enemy force had gathered in the grounds adjoining the tomb of Mian Mir and that there were only a few guards at the gate of the fort and the force within was also nominal. This intelligence was passed on by the same maid who had administered poison to Sheel Kaur. Ever since then she had been feeling so sorry that now she always lent a helping hand to Bijay Singh and apprised him of the outside happenings. Today, when she came out of the fort for some purpose, she went straight

to the blind person staying in the mud hut near 'Dehra Sahib' of Sri Guru Arjan Dev. Bhai Ramta Singh, a Sikh spy was already there and he immediately took her to his Sardar to whom she passed the above information. She also assured him that she would lead them to the room where Bijay Singh was staying.*

As night fell, ten persons appeared suddenly on the gate of the fort and in a sharp skirmish wounded and overpowered the guards who were caught unawares and so could not offer much resistance. At a coded sound signal from them fifty more of their men immediately came up from behind and entered the fort. Closely on their heels came another fifty and placed themselves at the gate, while a similar number advancing further positioned themselves four each, at a distance of every hundred yards. A little distance away some more of their men were lying in wait in order to rush reinforcement at the call of a whistle. The maid hurriedly led Mastan Singh and his men to the door of the room where Bijay Singh was staying. As they looked into the room through a slit, they saw that it was the very picture of heaven. Spread with rich woollen and velvet carpets, it was furnished with peacock-feather beds.

The roof inlaid with glass reflected the splendour, while the rich candle stands with burning candles added to its immense beauty. Beautiful pictures hung from walls and the entire room was heavily scented. Four of the most beautiful young women, sat around Bijay Singh, trying to prevail upon him saying, to respond positively to the Begum's overtures or face dire penalty soon. Bijay Singh, remained unmoved and the maids left disappointed. Now, four dark complexioned, dreadful looking persons

* This maid later accepted Sikhism and after baptism, spent the whole of her life in the service of the Sikh 'sangats'.

came with naked swords in their hands and surrounded him. They held out threats to him, but, the blessed soul refused to be over-awed. Mastan Singh was in a great fix. If he tried to advance, Bijay Singh could be killed at once by the negroes, while, on the other hand, the delay could be disastrous to the whole mission. Meanwhile, Karora Singh also came over there and saw through the slit. The wise man immediately asked the maid if there was any other entry to the room. She said, "Yes, there is one by which I can enter the room."

Karora Singh: Does the Begum in any way suspect you?

Maid: No, sir.

Karora Singh: Then go to the room immediately and send away the negroes on some pretext.

The maid did likewise and sent away the men saying, "Make haste and go to the Begum because some strangers have entered the fort." As the maid did not invoke any suspicion, the negroes hastened out of the room. They had hardly turned their back, when Mastan Singh broke open the door with the butt of his rifle and entered the room. The very next moment Karora Singh also came in with the holy words.

"Sayeth Nanak the God's Servant that the Creator helped me overcome myriads such material difficulties".

He embraced Bijay Singh and both of them came out of the room. They greeted each other with 'Sat Sri Akal'. Mastan Singh and Dharam Singh also embraced him. Bijay Singh also greeted them very warmly although he was somewhat bewildered. Because of the danger looming large around them the Sardar ordered an immediate

retreat. As the Sikhs were going back stealthily they saw a couple of soldiers standing in front of a gaol. As they tried to aim their rifles at them, the Sikhs fell upon them and put them to sword. While they were still inside the fort, they heard sirens and the guns started firing aimlessly.

In great anger, the Begum was shouting loudly. The Sikhs had hardly reached the main gate of the fort when three or four search lights were mounted which illumined everything. In the light the Turks saw the army of the Sikhs heading towards the river. Karora Singh immediately realized that the enemy would resort to cannon fire from three or four directions, and it could cause them a great harm. However, being sure that it would take sometime for the guns to be loaded, he ordered a quick retreat at which, the Sikh squads flew past at a great speed. By God's grace the Sikhs were already beyond the range of the enemy's cannon fire when it came into action. Very soon they reached the dense marsh lands passing through which, in the dark hours of the night, the Sikhs took shelter in a hiding place, a couple of miles away. They stayed there for the time being and Bijay Singh was reunited with his family. All of them offered prayers of thanksgiving to God for His help.

Bijay Singh resumed his old duties and Sheel Kaur engaged herself in the service of 'Langer' (free Kitchen). The time being comparatively of some respite to the Sikhs, they lived in peace and comfort. After a very long spell of tortures and tyrannies, the virtuous family enjoyed a happy time together.



CHAPTER -- XXII

As for the Begum, the moment she learnt about the Sikhs' entry into the fort she flew into a rage and took the Jamadar (Governor) of the fort to task. Although he lost no time in taking suitable action, yet the Sikhs were already beyond his reach. The irate Begum imprisoned the Jamadar and summoning the rest of the troops camping near the tomb of Mian Mir sent them in hot pursuit of the Sikhs. However, after a fruitless search for two full days, they also had to return empty-handed because they could not find any trace of the Sikhs. After a couple of days when her anger subsided a bit, she felt very much hurt and distressed at the affront and slip which Bijay Singh had given her.

To add to her anguish she had come to know about the reports that had been sent against her to the Emperor, by her courtiers and consequently was much worried about her position as a ruler. However, the news helped her to regain her manly qualities which had become weak in the face of Bijay Singh's charms. She once again came into her own and firmly asserted her authority saying that anybody who dared to pose a challenge to her would be annihilated. Calling for her news-writer she had a letter written to Kabui that taking advantage of her limitations as a woman, all the Omerahs of her court had become very arrogant and were trying to grab political power. They were also plundering the people and were even in league with the Sikhs, who, as a result, had once again become very active all over the country. One day, these Omerahs had opened the gate of the fort to allow the

Sikhs to enter and the 'Jamadar' had also turned a traitor and joined them. Had she not put up a brave flight single-handed, Lahore would have been lost. They were now trying to incite Delhi against her and as such, it would be expedient to send a competent and honest officer who should be willing to work faithfully under her orders.

Hearing this, Abdali flew into a rage and thinking decided to send Jahandar Khan to Lahore at the head of a force.

Immediately on arrival at Lahore, Jahandar Khan took the administration in his hands as the prime minister of the Begum. He, however, found himself in a very difficult situation because the old and experienced officers would just not co-operate with him, while the new ones were quite incompetent. He worked hard but without much success. ON the other hand, Sikhs also gave him a very hard time by creating trouble every where. At places, it became difficult to realise the government revenue and whatever little was collected was looted by the Sikhs on the way to the treasury. The far flung areas were completely under the control of the Sikhs, while those closer to the capital were also not safe. On the one hand there was no body to lend a helping hand to Jahandar Khan and on the other he was handicapped by the Begum's orders which he had to follow. In great chagrin he went back after an all too brief stay.* Thus, in spite of all of the efforts to stem the root, the conditions in Punjab continued to deteriorate. The old ministers who had, to some extent, themselves helped to create those conditions were closely watching the situation and were sending reports to Delhi. Ghazi-ud-din who although a mere wazir of the Delhi Emperor, was the *de-facto* ruler.

* Kanahya Lal, History p. 78

Taking advantage of the situation he marched towards Lahore with a large force.

When the Begum learnt about it, she immediately wrote a letter to Ghazi-ud-din saying that he had been misled by the Omerahs. She was absolutely faithful to Delhi and was prepared to remove any doubts in this respect. According to Mohd. Latif, "It seems that Mir Mannu, by order to strengthen his position at Delhi court, had before his death, promised his daughter to Ghazi-ud-din who still hoped to secure the young lady, though, after his death, both she and her mother were extremely averse to it." When Ghazi-ud-din had first heard about the anarchy at Lahore, he sent Sayad Jamil to help the Begum in the administration of the State. When Jamil introduced certain reforms, the Omerahs feeling unsure of his bonafides, conspired to turn him against the Begum. They managed to have all the erstwhile state officers reinstated to their original positions, and sent such damaging reports against the Begum to Ghazi-ud-din that he turned dead against her. When she requested him to withdraw Jamil, he refused to oblige her. Thereupon, the Begum made a representation to the Abdali king against the maltreatment meted to her at the hands of Delhi.* When Ghazi-ud-din learnt about the Begum's hobnobbing with Kabul, he himself marched against Lahore, accompanied by Mirza Ali Gohar, the elder son of the Alamgir. Reaching Machhiwara, the Wazir opened negotiations with the Begum for his marriage to her daughter and, with a handful of followers, advanced towards Lahore, as if to celebrate the marriage. The Begum was completely taken in by this

* According to Kanahya Lal, the Begum herself went to Kabul for the purpose, but from other sources, it does not appear to be correct.

move. He entered the city on the pretext of solemnizing the marriage but at once took charge of the city and its fort and assumed the reins of power. It was too late when the Begum realized that she had been turned a prisoner in her own palace.

She, however, refused to give him her daughter in marriage, and the Ghazi stripped her of her rank and title and deported her to Delhi as a state prisoner.¹ The government of Lahore was entrusted by the Wazir to Adina Beg for a tribute of thirty lakhs of rupees. On reaching Machhiwara, the Begum succeeded in winning over the support of Prince Ali Gohar who pleaded with Ghazi-ud-din for the reinstatement of his mother-in-law. He was, however, adamant and continued to maltreat her in every possible way. On her way to Delhi, the incensed mother-in-law cursed Ghazi-ud-din for his treachery and prophesied the fall of their Empire at the hands of Abdali.

On coming to know of the occupation of Lahore by the Delhi Government. Abdali descended upon the already ravaged and plundered State of the Punjab in 1873 Bikrami (1170 Hijri or 1756 A.D.) at the head of a strong Afghan force.² Sayad Jamil and Adina Beg ran

1. Umad-ut-Twarikh.
2. Most probably Murad Begum had promised to marry her daughter to Abdali's son. Besides, she was his regent at Lahore. As such, he felt insulted at Ghazi-ud-din's action and decided to punish Delhi. All Persian records, including Latif, endorse these views, but Kanahya Lal does not agree. The arrival of Jahandar from Kabul, the Begum's personal visit to Kabul and the engagement of Ghazi-ud-din are disputed by some sources. But Jamil's stay at Lahore and his strained relations with Begum are accepted by every author as true. However, it is an established historical fact that the Begum had incited Abdali's invasion, because Ghazi-ud-din had persecuted her and had robbed her of her throne at Lahore and that he was at Delhi during Abdali's invasion.

away at the approach of Abdali. Adina Beg sought refuge with the hill-chieftains. The Sikhs Sardars, finding their dominions closer to Abdali route, also retired to the safety of the woods, thereby, giving a free passage to him. Taking hold of Lahore he subjected its Omerahs to ruthless plunder and Chuhar Mal was also one of the victims.* Leaving the rule of Lahore and Jalandhar in the hands of Mir Munzam and Raja Nasir Ali respectively, he himself left for Delhi.

Instead of giving him a flight, Alamgir II received him with a warm hospitality on his arrival at Delhi.

Now, Ghazi-ud-din, afraid of saving his skin made up with the Begum, through the good offices of prince Ali Gohar. She even interceded on his behalf with the invader

- * During the plunder of his house Chuhar Mal himself got killed. His elder son had already been imprisoned by the Begum. As for the poor mother, having been betrayed and plundered by the family priest (the government informer) she went to Amritsar and engaged herself in service at Harmandir Sahib. Pundit, the Govt. informer, meanwhile, continue to prosper. During Abdali's return march to Lahore after plundering Delhi, the Sikhs had relieved him of as much booty as they could. On his arrival at Lahore he issued orders for the eradication of the Sikhs and for this purpose sought secret information about them through agents. As he himself was in a hurry to go to Turkistan, to suppress a rebellion there, he ordered his son, Tymur Shah, to punish the Sikhs for the excesses they had committed. During Tymur's reign the Pundit used to supply information against them. Once he reported the presence of about fifty Sikhs in a certain jungle, at which an army of about hundred Turks was sent against them. The Sikhs turned out to be about five hundred strong and the Turks suffered a big loss. At this, Tymur charged the Pundit with giving deliberately wrong information and executed him after subjecting his house to plunder. Thus, the informer met his end at the hands of those very persons whom he used to serve in his evil ways.

and had him pardoned. Nevertheless, he had to pay a very handsome tribute of millions of rupees. Many other Omerahs also met with a similar treatment at the hands of cruel and avaricious Abdali. He demanded ninety lakhs of rupees from Intizam-ud-doula, who expressed his inability to pay such a heavy amount. However, after a search of his house, three times more amount was recovered from him. Then, on the information supplied by the Begum, the house of Shohlapuri Begum, wife of Kamur-ud-din was also searched and cash, ornaments and jewels worth several lakhs of rupees were found and seized. The avaricious Shah's thirst for riches and wealth was not yet satiated, greater calamities were still in store for the unfortunate people of Delhi. Having extorted all he could from the Omerahs of the State, he ordered the town to be pillaged. The Shah remained at Delhi for two months, during which period the unfortunate capital was systematically plundered. He then laid siege proceeding then to Balabgarh, a strong fort, and put the garrison to sword. Proceeding then to Mathura, he fell upon the city while the people were celebrating one of their religious festivals, and had them slaughtered without any quarters being shown to anyone. Their rich and spacious temples were razed to ground and hundreds of Hindus were carried into slavery. The tyrant next advanced to Agra, where he unleashed death and devastation throughout the territory of the Jats. As if in divine retribution cholera broke out among the ranks of Abdali. He had also come to know of the Sikh disturbances in Punjab. He, therefore, returned to Delhi where he married his son Tymur to the grand-daughter of Mohammad Shah and himself formed a matrimonial alliance with Hazarat Begum, the younger daughter of the Emperor. Having then levied a heavy indemnity on the

emperor Alamgir, he reinstated him on the throne of his ancestors and appointed. Intizam-ud-doula and Najib-ud-doula to the posts of grand Wazir and commander-in-chief respectively. On reaching Lahore from Delhi. Abdali appointed his son Tymur as its ruler. He wanted to punish the Sikhs but could not do so because it was very difficult to deal with the Sikhs and also due to disturbances in Turkistan he was anxious to go back immediately. Thus, according to Elphinston, the cause of spoliation and ruin which had been commenced by Nadir Shah was consummated by Ahmed Shah.

Thus, while avenging herself on her enemies, the Murad Begum subjected hundreds of thousands of those innocent people also to untold tortures and tyrannies, who had never caused her any harm. But how about, her own end? Most of the records are silent about it. According to some, she was also one of the victims of the cholera infection, while others thinks that she was killed through slow poisoning at the hands of Omerahs who had suffered because of her machinations. This then was the hopeless end of the 'Begum of Hopes' (Murad Begum). Divested of her charm and craft, power and pelf, she met with a very very wretched end.



CHAPTER – XXIII

At the news of Ahmed Shah's arrival in India, Sayad Jamil had run away to Delhi. During his flight he fell many a time victim of the Sikh guerillas attacks which mauled him very severely and deprived him of much of his wealth. However, somehow, he managed to save his skin from these lions and reach Delhi in great distress. There was now a political vacuum in the country and taking full advantage, of this fluid state the Sikhs spread themselves far and wide. Karora Singh's was one of the leading Sikh bands (Jathas) those days. As said earlier, at the time of the arrival of Abdali in India, the sikhs had retired to woods and hill fastnesses, and allowed him to reach Lahore without any resistance. After plundering the town he had gone to Delhi. Nazir-ud-din, whom he had installed as the governor of Jalandhar, now began to persecute the Sikhs. He would arrest innocent people in their villages and put them to sword. The Sikhs could not stand this cruelty and, coming out of their hiding places, engaged a big army of the Turks, led by Nazir Ali, Shams Khan and Jafar Khan etc. near Adamwal. A very bitter battle was waged in which both sides lost heavily, according to Panth Parkash, Tara Singh Gaiba, Karora Singh, Karam Singh, Jai Singh, Charat Singh, Jassa Singh, Baghat Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia etc. were conspicuous for their feats of valour. By the grace of the Guru, each of the Sikhs humbled as many as ten of the enemy ranks. Said Khan and Jaffar Khan etc. were killed on the battle field and collecting a large booty, the Sikhs crossed river Beas to safety.

During the course of this battle, Bijay Singh got surrounded by ten of the enemy troops with whom he had been fighting all alone. Although he succeeded in killing five of them yet, he received many wounds on his person. Seeing this, Nasir Ali reached there with a fresh contingent. Bijay Singh would have been killed but for the timely arrival there of Jassa Singh with some of his men who happened to have seen him. A very bitter fight was then fought in which swords clashed with swords, because there was no time to take them on the shields. Totally unmindful of the wounds inflicted on their persons, these brave sons of Guru fought with rare zeal and passion. In this battle about a dozen Sikhs were seriously wounded, while Nasir Ali was left with only three of his men. At this he rode away from the battle field at great speed and the moment he turned his back the entire enemy force took to its heels. After pursuing the enemy for some distance, the Sikhs crossed the river. Their only aim was to allow no respite to Abdali, to strike terror among his ranks and to ensure the safety of their own brethren. Jassa Singh examined the wounded and carried those of them with him who had still some life left in them, while cremating those who had died. Thereafter, he too crossed river Beas.

Halting at a place on the other side of the river, the Sikhs took stock of their wounded companions and examined them closely and carefully. Sheel Kaur alongwith her sisters-in-Faith tended their wounds with the help of other Singhs. Hardly had they finished their job, when Bijay Singh reached there. Having been left behind, he reached there last of all. He appeared to be in great pain and as he tried to alight from his horse, he fell flat on the ground, in a state of unconsciousness. Sheel Kaur and one

of the Sikhs, Raghooraj Singh, by name, lifted him up and laid him down at a quiet place. One of the Singhs hastened to bring some water, while Sheel Kaur and Raghooraj Singh tried to find the cause of his trouble. His face was turning paler and his pulse was growing weaker every moment. As water was being sprinkled on his face, Karora Singh and Jassa Singh also reached there. Bijay Singh opened his eyes and said in a very feeble voice, "Blessed indeed is God." When Jassa Singh asked him about the cause of his trouble, he placed his hand on his chest. Underneath his shirt, they found a piece of cloth tied tightly round his chest. As they untied it, they found a pad of cloth placed on a deep wound, on removing which the blood gushed forth from the wound as a fountain and besmeared all around.

As the wound started bleeding, Bijay Singh lost all consciousness. Everybody was in a great panic. The cloth pad was immediately replaced and held there tightly, while a couple of Singh brought a doctor from a nearby village. Tending the wound and filling it with some medicine, he dressed it properly. It was clear that even after receiving the wound, Bijay Singh had kept on fighting as a result of which some of the veins close to the heart had been ruptured, because of which it was now difficult to control the bleeding.

Nevertheless, the village doctor administered storax and some other elixir to Bijay Singh, as result of which he opened his eyes. He now hugged his dear child, kissed his forehead and blessed him thus, "May you ever uphold the glory of your Faith." Sheel Kaur, was gently massaging his feet and an unending stream of tears was flowing down her cheeks. Summoning her closer, Bijay Singh, embraced her with the blessings, "May the Lord ever help

you to uphold your honour and your Faith.” Thereafter, he greeted every Sardar in a very feeble voice. In great agony, Sheel Kaur said, “How would I be able to live alone after you?” Bijay Singh consoled her saying, “God shall ever be with you, yea, every hour and every moment of your life you will be blessed with His grace”. Then, he asked her to recite Japji. Wiping her tears and resigning herself to the Will of God, Sheel Kaur began to recite Japji in a very sweet voice. Meanwhile, Bijay Singh’s breathing, became slower and slower and his eyes began to close. The Sardars were watching their brother-in-Faith, with their minds attuned to God. The wound continued to bleed despite of every effort to control it. As Sheel Kaur began to recite the last ‘Shaloka’, Bijay Singh gently raised both of his hands and joining them, heartily greeted everybody. Exactly when Sheel Kaur had uttered the words:

“Those who meditate His Name,
truly do they toil,
Nanak, their being is radiant,
and, many others do they save.”

Bijay Singh joined her in reciting thrice the holy words, “Many others do they save many others do they save.....many other do they save.....” Thereafter, he said, in complete devotion, “Blessed is the Lord of aigrette (Guru Gobind Singh) and blessed is the holy SANGAT (holy Assembly).....Blessed.....Blessed..... Blessed.”

The effort involved in uttering these words made blood gush forth from his wound with such force that Bijay Singh’s body became still. His hands fell on his chest and his eyes and lips were closed for ever. Sheel Kaur had been

watching the life slowly ebbing away reciting, all the time, the holy words, “many others do they save.....”

Her gaze was fixed, her face expressing the agony of her soul losing its glow. She saw Bijay Singh breathe his last. Her head fell on his chest with the holy words, “Many others do they save,” on her lips and thus the last breath of the faithful wife mingled with that of her husband. Thus, like a true wife Sheel Kaur stood by her husband in love and in faith, both here and hereafter:

“Nanak, they alone are true
‘Satis’, who die with the sheer
shock of separation.”

All glory to Sheel Kaur who was the very embodiment of fidelity and love. She proved with her life that husband and wife, though different in bodies, are one in soul.

Karora Singh hastened to lift the head of her sister, but where was she? His sister had gone with her husband. There were tears in the eyes of the bravest of the brave and everybody sat in silence. No one spoke or moved and all were choked with emotion. There tears were neither for expressing unthankfulness nor for non-acceptance of the God’s Will, but a homage to the ideal couple who had lived and died as true Sikhs.

Says Nanak, he alone wails truly
Who wails in Lord’s Love.

Bijay Singh’s son who had been orphaned all of a sudden was in tears and bewildered. Lifting him up in his lap, Karora Singh tried to console and caress him. Although the child had passed through many trials and tribulations and had received enough training at the hands of his parents, yet, their sudden death was too much for him. He

was very much touched by the love and words of consolations shown to him. Very gently he placed his head on the bodies of his parents and in great anguish uttered the words,

“Mother dearest, why have you, today, taken the cup of poison all alone ——.”

Jassa Singh took the little child aside and tried to console him. All through the night, holy Scriptures were recited with the deepest of devotion. On day break, the bodies were cremated with great respect and the ashes thereafter were immersed in the river Beas. Bijay Singh's son later turned out to be a great hero. Karora Singh brought him up like his own son and trained him to be a worthy son of the Panth. In whose service he performed many a heroic deed.

